SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS:

OR,

A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

IN THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.
Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed. Heb. i. 1, 2. ii. 1.

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SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS:

VOLUME THE THIRD,

CONTAINING

THE FIRST PART

OF THE

PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

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SCRIPTURE

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

CHAPTER I.

The New Testament, like the Old, instructs us by examples—Preparation made for Messiah's appearance—John appointed His harbinger—commended by our Lord—his birth, education, and early piety—office—austerity—doctrine of repentance—baptism—reproofs and admonitions—testimony concerning Christ—baptized Jesus—referred all to Him—effects of his preaching—reviled—sent for by Herod, imprisoned—directed his disciples to enquire of Jesus—beheaded—buried.

THE Old and New Testament are closely connected, as parts of the same plan, which mutually confirm and illustrate each other. Both are derived from the same divine original; and therefore there can be no opposition between them. But, without detracting from the authority or excellence of the more ancient scriptures, we may assert, that the New Testament claims our peculiar regard, as containing the clearest and most in-

terefting revelation ever delivered [redacted]nd, and exhibiting the completion of [redacted] defign, which had been in fome meafure made known from the beginning. Salvation was publifhed to Adam immediately after the fall, and in every fucceeding age intimations were given, that redemption fhould be accomplifhed. Yet much obfcurity refted on all thefe various difpenfations, till it pleafed God to difperfe the darknefs by the full manifeftation of his grace through Jefus Chrift, and to " bring life and immortality to light through the Gofpel *."

In the New Teftament, alfo, we perceive the fame mode of inftruction adopted as in the Old. Our faith, indeed, is fixed by an exprefs and authoritative declaration of the truth: but it is not taught in the fame fyftematical way as in the generality of human writings. A confiderable portion of this little volume is hiftorical; and accordingly, it explains and inculcates the principles of our religion by facts and examples. Thefe we fhall endeavour fairly to reprefent; pointing out at the fame time the practical improvement of each circumftance as it occurs. Though we fhall neceffarily be led to infift on evangelical doctrines, for they will offer themfelves to our notice, and furely they are too important to be overlooked, yet we fhall not lofe fight of our original intention, of deducing profitable leffons for the regulation of our conduct from the principal lives and characters which are recorded.

We are now paffing from the comparative obfcurity of all the preceding ages, to behold the fplendour of a

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

perfect

perfect day breaking forth in the Gofpel. Do we not exult, while we hear a heavenly voice addreffing us, "Arife, fhine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is rifen upon thee *?" But the Chriftian difpenfation, fo bright and excellent, was ufhered in by one of an inferior luftre, which prepared the way for it. The revelations of God have gradually increafed in their clearnefs from the beginning. As, in the natural world, we are not furprifed by the fudden burft of day, for we have notices of its approach; fo the Sun of Righteoufnefs did not arife, till an illuftrious harbinger, like the morning ftar, had announced his appearing.

But who fhall be appointed "to go before the face of the Lord?" We might conclude, it muft be One of diftinguifhed excellence; and accordingly we find the higheft character given of JOHN THE BAPTIST, for whom this honour was referved. Our Lord ftyles him "a burning and a fhining light †," and declares, "among them that are born of women, there hath not rifen a greater than John the Baptift ‡." Many very eminent perfons are exhibited in the Old Teftament; but, upon the opening of the new difpenfation, the grace of God was more abundantly difplayed. John the Baptift had the pre-eminence above all the ancient patriarchs and prophets, in the dignity of his office, and his fpiritual difcernment. Many of them had defired to fee and hear thofe things, of which he was witnefs; but they were not permitted. They fpake and wrote much con-

* Ifa. lx. 1. † John v. 35. ‡ Mat. xi. 11.

cerning the Saviour, and had large diſcoveries of his worth and excellence: but John was favoured with more expreſs revelations, underſtood and deſcribed more clearly the nature and benefits of his redemption, and himſelf beheld his glory. They pointed to him, as to a diſtant object, the "Meſſiah that was to come;" John not only proclaimed his immediate approach, but referred the people to him, as already preſent before them, ſaying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſin of the world *!"

Yet the commendation of the Baptiſt by our Lord, is given with ſome limitation. Though John was advanced above all, who preceded him, many, who came after him, are placed in a higher point of elevation. "He that is leaſt in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." For, as the great myſtery of godlineſs was ſoon afterwards more fully opened, one of the leaſt abilities and meaneſt office in the Church of Chriſt (which is often ſignified by "the kingdom of heaven") might underſtand more of the plan of ſalvation, than even this eminent ſaint. Not merely the Apoſtles, but other inferior miniſters, and even private Chriſtians in the preſent day, are to be conſidered as favoured with clearer diſcoveries, than John, of the riches of divine grace, and of the peculiar nature and glory of the Goſpel diſpenſation. Let us, then, adore the mercy of God in affording us opportunities and privileges, which ſome of his moſt illuſtrious ſervants, in former times, did not enjoy. Let us value and improve our advantages, and pray that we may obtain ſuch diſtinct views

* John i. 29.

of

of redemption through the blood of Chriſt, as are ſuited to the excellency of that economy, under which we are placed.

The fourth year before the common account called Anno Domini.

Many remarkable circumſtances attended the coming of the Baptiſt, which fixed the eyes of the public upon him, and excited a general expectation of ſome great events, to be accompliſhed by him. He was introduced by a train of miracles. His parents were too far advanced in years to look for any children in the common courſe of nature *. But an Angel from heaven announced his birth, and acquainted the father Zacharias, with the character and office which his intended ſon ſhould ſuſtain. His very name was determined; and it was foretold by the divine meſſenger, that he ſhould be a perſon of peculiar holineſs and abſtinence, "filled with the Holy Ghoſt even from his mother's womb;" and, as the promiſed forerunner of the Meſſiah, be the favoured inſtrument of "turning many of the children of Iſrael to the Lord their God." Declarations ſo wonderful Zacharias was backward to credit; and therefore, for a puniſhment of his unbelief, and a confirmation of the prediction, he was inſtantly ſtruck ſpeechleſs. At the appointed time the child was born; and on the eighth day, when the rite of circumciſion was performed, Zacharias directed, in obedience to the Angel, that he ſhould be called JOHN, which ſignifies, "The gift or mercy of the Lord." Immediately the tongue of the pious fa-

* Luke i. 5, &c.

ther was loosed, and, under the abundant and powerful influence of the Holy Ghost, "He spake and praised God." The spirit of prophecy had ceased from the days of Malachi, that is, about four hundred years; but it was revived in Zacharias, who broke forth upon this event into an inspired song, expressing the most ardent gratitude to God for remembering his holy covenant and sending redemption to his people. The venerable priest enlarged upon the nature and excellence of the salvation to be effected; and, then looking on his infant son, he exclaimed, "Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

These surprising circumstances could not fail to attract the notice of the neighbourhood. "All they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be?" and probably they were the more disposed to receive him, when he entered on his public ministry. His education, also, and deportment from his infancy, were so singular, as to excite general regard. "The hand of the Lord was with him," not only according to the common course of providence to support, invigorate, and protect him, but to endue him with an extraordinary measure of wisdom,

dom, holineſs, and zeal, and other ſpecial gifts for his miniſterial ſervice. "The child grew, and waxed ſtrong in ſpirit."

Shall not we, alſo, perceive and admire the merciful interpoſition of our God, in behalf of his Church? He hath been ever mindful of his promiſe; and at the proper ſeaſon he hath not delayed to raiſe up ſuitable inſtruments for the execution of his purpoſes. "Out of the mouth of babes and ſucklings he hath perfected praiſe *." And this conſideration furniſhes encouragement, both to parents and children. Shall we not be concerned, and emboldened to pray for them, that they alſo, like John, may be ſanctified from the womb? If we ſee that they poſſeſs, not only a vigorous conſtitution, but wiſdom and fervour in the ſervice of God, and that early habits of goodneſs are formed in them, let us aſcribe it to the divine grace, and devoutly acknowledge, "The hand of the Lord is with them."

John was an eminent pattern of religion even from his infancy. Ah! how different are the generality of young perſons among ourſelves; ſeeking happineſs from carnal gratifications and the pride of life! But behold the Baptiſt flying from the noiſe of riot and diſſipation, and cultivating communion with God, by meditation and prayer, in a moſt retired ſituation. It is ſuppoſed, that he was deprived of his pious parents in his tender years, and that under the influence of the Spirit, he ſecluded himſelf from ſociety, to be the better fitted for his future ſervice. "He was in the deſerts," in thoſe

* Mat. xxi. 16.

parts of Judea, which were little inhabited, where he was ſeparated from public temptations, and had opportunities of private devotion. There he continued "till the day of his ſhewing unto Iſrael," when he entered on his prophetic office, as it were by inauguration, at the age of thirty years. It is granted, there was a peculiar auſterity and mortification in John's conduct, ſuited to the purpoſes of his miniſtry, which is not enjoined upon all. But, if you plead an exemption from ſuch ſeverities, are you therefore at liberty to indulge every vain and fooliſh deſire of your hearts, to ſpend your time and ſtrength in ſenſual indulgence, and, by abuſing the world, to provoke the God who made it? Poſſibly, you may ſpeak well of John's eminent ſanctity, becauſe he is removed from the earth, and his example cannot now diſturb you: but do you not hate thoſe in the preſent day who in any meaſure reſemble him, and live in holy temperance and ſelf-denial, "renouncing the pomps and vanities of this wicked world *?"

But for what poſt or employment was this remarkable child deſigned? He came to fulfil the ancient prophecies, which foretold the appearance of a glorious perſon, as a harbinger or forerunner of the Meſſiah †. This character the Baptiſt claimed; and particular care is taken by the Evangeliſts to prove, that thoſe ſcriptures had their completion in him. He was the ELIJAH, whom Malachi deſcribed. For, though he aſſumed not the name of that zealous reformer, he poſſeſſed his ſpirit and power, and reſembled him in his external garb and

* Catechiſm. † Iſa. xl. 3. Mal. iii. 1. iv. 5, 6.

abſtemious

abſtemious fare, as well as in the ardour and fidelity with which he exerciſed his miniſtry *.

When kings and great men of the earth are about to travel, they ſend their meſſengers before them, that, all due preparations being made, they may meet with a ready reception. Every obſtacle, which might prevent their progreſs, muſt be removed; the rugged mountains levelled; the deep valleys raiſed up; the winding path muſt be rendered ſtraight, and all the rough places ſmooth. To do this in the moral world; to proclaim the approach of the King of kings; to take out of the way whatever might oppoſe his admiſſion, ſuch as ignorance, pride, prejudice, and the love of preſent things; and to diſpoſe the people to receive him by a repreſentation of his glory, and of the benefits which he beſtows; theſe were among the great objects of the Baptiſt's office.

It were eaſy to ſhew, that he came at the very ſeaſon, which had been foretold. For the ſceptre was departing from Judah, the ſeventy weeks of Daniel were expiring, and many were "waiting for the conſolation of Iſrael," when John appeared to declare, that the promiſed Deliverer of the Church was at hand, and that "the Lord, whom they ſought, would ſuddenly come to his temple †." The ſcriptures cannot be broken: every part ſhall have its full accompliſhment, in the proper time and way. It becomes us to leave to

and rejoice, that He, who remembers his holy Covenant, will perform whatever ſhall be needful for the ſalvation of his people.

According to the common Chriſtian era, called Anno Domini, 26.

It is ſuppoſed, that John did not enter upon his miniſtry, nor come forward to public view, till he was thirty years old *. We do not therefore cenſure him as averſe to engage in his work; but we grieve to obſerve ſome, very unlike him, raſh and precipitate, full of their own importance, eager to be employed, who run and are not ſent. He waited in modeſt retirement till he received his commiſſion. But when " the word of God came to him" (and the revelation, doubtleſs, carried its own evidence with it), he delayed no longer, but went forth, with the utmoſt earneſtneſs, to reprove and awaken the careleſs and impenitent. Every thing in his appearance, his manners, and his doctrine, tended to excite a ſolemnity and a ſeriouſneſs in the minds of his audience. He was clothed, as the ancient prophets, with a rough garment, which was compoſed only of camels hair, and bound about him with a leathern girdle; and he ſubſiſted on ſuch food as the wilderneſs afforded, " locuſts and wild honey." His addreſs alſo was calculated to ſtrike an awe into the people: for he ſpake with authority as a meſſenger from God, " Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Here we obſerve the nature and the grand ſubject of his preaching. He declared, that the Lord God was about to eſtabliſh in the earth that holy and ſpiritual kingdom which had

* Mat. iii. 1, &c. Luke iii. 1, &c.

been

been foretold, especially by Daniel *; and that no one could be admitted into it, who did not abhor and forsake his sin, and with a contrite heart return unto the Lord. He considered all persons without exception, as in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation. He unreservedly exhibited the doctrine, which alone prepares for a renewal of heart. He was the preacher of that discipline, which makes the soul submit to the grace and government of Jesus, and which must be felt and understood in order to its everlasting salvation. Those who professed a deep compunction, were required to conform to the significant rite of baptism, which he administered; thereby publicly acknowledging their pollution, their need of a spiritual washing, and determination to abandon every evil way.

A teacher so remarkable could not but excite general notice; and accordingly we find that immense multitudes of people resorted to him, and were brought under the most serious impressions. Yet he sought not popular applause; for his admonitions were so pointed, his reproofs so severe, that they seemed likely to be offensive in the extreme. Men of all ranks and characters, the most opposite in principle, attended on his ministry; but he flattered none. While many of the Pharisees and Sadducees flocked after him (the former of whom were strict in all external observances of religion, the latter licentious and profane), he addressed them in terms of the sharpest reprehension, and described them all as under the same condemnation.

* Dan. ii. 44. vii. 14, 27.

Surprised

Surpriſed by their appearance, and ſuſpecting their ſincerity, he called on them to give decided proofs of their penitence by fruits of righteouſneſs. He warned them, that their relation to Abraham, and their place in the viſible Church, would avail them nothing; that the laſt trial was then afforded them; and that, if this were neglected, their caſe was deſperate, their everlaſting deſtruction unavoidable.

Many of his polite and learned hearers were offended with his plainneſs of ſpeech, and unwilling to comply with his injunctions; but, among the common people and notorious ſinners, many were awakened by his doctrine, and probably converted to God *. Theſe diſcovered a ſerious attention to his words, and profeſſed a readineſs to be directed by him in their future conduct. Accordingly, he preſſed upon them the duties of charity, juſtice, and forbearance, and cautioned them againſt thoſe particular ſins, to which their reſpective ſituations expoſed them †.

A doubt ſeemed to be entertained, whether he were not the promiſed Meſſiah; but this was ſoon reſolved by his unreſerved declarations. He teſtified, that the Saviour, who was about to appear, poſſeſſed a dignity immenſely ſuperior, and that he conſidered himſelf unworthy to perform the meaneſt offices for ſo exalted a character. He repreſented Him as pouring upon his Church the abundant influences of the Holy Ghoſt, which, reſembling fire in its operations and effects, enlivens and purifies the ſoul. But he warned

* Luke vii. 29, 30.   † iii. 10—18.

his audience, that the ſame illuſtrious Perſonage is not to be impoſed upon by any vain pretences to piety; for that He will make an awful ſeparation between the righteous and the wicked, detect the hypocrites, and deſtroy them for ever.

At length when Jeſus came forth to public view, and preſented himſelf to be baptized, John pointed him out as the very Chriſt, of whom he had ſpoken *. It had been wiſely ordered in the providence of God, that theſe two, though ſo nearly related, were till that time ſtrangers to each other: for thus all ſuſpicion of a colluſion between them was prevented. But then, it ſhould ſeem, the Baptiſt received a ſecret revelation, that the perſon approaching him was the Meſſiah; and therefore, under a ſenſe of his own inferiority and defilement, he cried out, "I have need to be baptized of thee; and, comeſt thou to me?" His objection, indeed, was overruled; and, when he had adminiſtered the divine ordinance, his teſtimony concerning Jeſus was immediately confirmed by the viſible deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, and a voice from heaven declaring his high character.

Do we not perceive and admire the meekneſs and humility of John who was ſo careful to aſſume nothing to himſelf, and to give all glory to Chriſt? The notice of the Jewiſh Sanhedrim at Jeruſalem was excited by the ſurpriſing effects of his miniſtry; and they ſent meſſengers to enquire the nature of his claims and the intent of his baptiſm. To them he replied, with the

* John i. 15, &c.

ſtrongeſt aſſeverations, that he pretended not to be any other than the Harbinger of the Saviour, and referred them to Jeſus, as the Perſon whom he came to introduce. Day after day, while Jeſus probably attended upon his preaching, John repeated his teſtimony concerning him, and called upon the ſurrounding multitudes to regard Him, as the great propitiatory ſacrifice, which alone can expiate our guilt: "Behold," ſaid he, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſin of the world!"

On another occaſion we perceive in him the ſame affectionate reſpect for Jeſus, and eager deſire to bring others acquainted with his character. When Jeſus had entered on his miniſtry, and immenſe numbers flocked after him, the diſciples of John were diſturbed, leſt their maſter's reputation ſhould ſuffer *. But the Baptiſt immediately corrected their jealouſy and narrowneſs of ſpirit, and, with an aſtoniſhing humility, and zeal, rejoiced that the Saviour ſhould be exalted, even though his own popularity would be thereby impaired. He proceeded to deſcribe the high dignity of this illuſtrious Perſonage, as the Bridegroom of his Church, the Lord from heaven, the well-beloved of the Father, the univerſal Governor, and ſolemnly declared, that every ſinner, rejecting his offered mercy, muſt inevitably lie under the wrath of God for ever.

This is an example, which claims the attention of all; for ſurely there is not an individual, who ſhould not labour to poſſeſs, though in a different ſphere of

* John iii. 26, &c.

action,

action, those graces which characterized the Baptist; such were his contempt of the world, humility, disinterestedness, and supreme regard to the Redeemer. But the ministers of religion seem more especially concerned to place this eminent pattern before them; for their office requires a nearer resemblance and imitation. They also are sent to "prepare the way of the Lord;" that, every obstacle being removed, He may come and reign in the hearts of his sinful creatures, which, like the wilderness, abound with various impediments, forbidding all access. How vast an undertaking! In a moral sense, the rough and crooked paths must be levelled and made straight. The faithful heralds must "cry aloud and spare not, and shew the people their transgressions," and proclaim unto the end of the world, "Behold, your Salvation cometh." In every different situation, to which they may be appointed, as they have but one object, their language must be the same, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." They must therefore preach the law, explain its extensive demands and tremendous sanctions, in order to convince men of their depravity, guilt, and danger, and of the necessity of an entire renovation. Thus they will labour, like John, to "turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

You admire the zeal, the courage, and the faithfulness of the Baptist; but are you desirous, that your ministers should in any measure copy after him? Are you willing to hear the doctrine, which he constantly delivered, and to be addressed with the same unreserved

plainness?

plainness? Be that as it may, your wishes in this case are not to be consulted: "whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear," the ambassadors of Christ must declare, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish *." Yes; it is indispensably requisite, that the most regular and decent persons should be converted, as well as open and gross offenders: This mortifies your pride, and alarms your fears; and therefore you are ready to quarrel with those, who assert such unwelcome truths. You cannot bear to be told of "fleeing from the wrath to come," or of being "burned up with fire unquenchable:" how, then, would you have been reconciled to the preaching of the Baptist?

But it is not enough, that the terrors of the law be denounced; those "who watch for your souls," will testify of Christ, will endeavour to display His glory, grace, and sufficiency, and exhort you to receive him, who comes "to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities †." They will direct you to the Cross, and entreat you, if you be under painful convictions of guilt, to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Your attendance, approbation, and esteem will be only so far pleasing to them, as they may thereby have the better opportunity of recommending the Saviour to your regard. Instead, therefore, of aiming at popular applause, they will be most solicitous for His exaltation, and will rejoice when He is magnified, whatever may become of them. But, from the same principle, they will also warn you,

* Luke xiii. 3. † Acts iii. 26.

that

that contempt and rejection of the Son of God will inevitably expose you to the wrath of God, and that throughout eternity?

Do you profess a serious concern for salvation? Your teachers, like John, will require you to evince your sincerity by your holy conduct, and will earnestly exhort you not to deceive yourselves by vain pretences to religion. They will therefore call upon you to discharge with fidelity the particular duties of your respective places, and to beware of those sins, which most easily beset you. Are you willing to listen to such instructions, and to yield a cheerful obedience? The most glorious effects may be expected from the ministry, which is exercised, like that of the Baptist, with wisdom, courage, impartiality, and faithfulness. Doubtless, he laboured to good purpose, among the men of that generation, and "many of the children of Israel did he turn to the Lord their God," according to the prophecy *. It appears, too, that his testimony was recollected after his death, in consequence of which, probably, many were disposed to believe on the Saviour †. But it must not be concealed, that his excellence of character did not secure him from contempt and ridicule. Among some, especially of the higher ranks, he was accounted no better than a madman, or a demoniac. "He hath a devil," was the scornful reproach cast upon him ‡. The case is somewhat similar among ourselves; "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;"

* Luke i. 16. † John x. 41. ‡ Luke vii. 33.

 the

the most exemplary conduct in ministers will not silence the gainsayers: and if John were to rise from the dead, and to preach as before, it is not likely that he would meet with any better treatment. Such kind of censures and derision will, indeed, appear of little consequence to those, who are chiefly solicitous to promote the honour of Christ and the salvation of souls. Whatever railing accusations are brought against them, exposed as they may be to violent opposition or "cruel mockings," if they are the instruments of turning any to the Lord, and rescuing them from the wrath to come, they will consider themselves as abundantly repayed, and distinguished with peculiar favour.

We cannot help wishing, that the valuable labours of the Baptist had been greatly prolonged for the benefit of the world. But it pleased God, whose ways are unsearchable, to appoint otherwise. The exercise of his public ministry was short indeed; he was not only soon interrupted, but even cut off, when, as there is reason to suppose, there had been a space of little more than three years, from his first official appearance. We hasten to consider the close of his life, which was attended with some afflictive circumstances, but not inglorious.

John, we have seen, was held in high estimation among the common people, and this excited the notice, if not the jealousy and displeasure, of the Great. Accordingly he was sent for, perhaps from motives of curiosity, to the court of Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee, before

before whom he had an opportunity of bearing a faithful testimony *. This prince was of an infamous character, and was then living in adultery with Herodias, the wife of his own brother Philip: yet he appeared to be much affected by the solemn admonitions of John, listened to him with pleasure, and, in compliance with his expostulations, reformed many parts of his conduct †. A worldly prudence would have suggested, that the preacher must be silent on the particular sins, and especially on the incestuous commerce, of the king. But the honest zeal of the Baptist could not refrain: and therefore, without fearing the consequences, he boldly reproved him, as for his other offences, so for his criminal connection with that base woman, declaring to him without reserve, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." So plain an address could not be relished: Herod immediately conceived the warmest resentment, and commanded him to be seized, bound, and cast into prison. The adulteress in her rage meditated further revenge; for she would have killed him. To this proposal, however, Herod would not at first consent; as he still retained a high reverence for John, from a conviction of his peculiar sanctity. Afterwards, indeed, that regard lost its influence, and he would have put him to death, but was awhile restrained, lest, by the murder of this holy man, who was generally beloved and venerated by the people, he should cause an insurrection among his subjects.

* Mat. xiv. 3, &c. Mark vi, 17, &c.

† See the character of this Herod illustrated in the next volume.

Shall we mourn for the imprisonment of the prophet? We must lament the interruption of his ministry; but there is no doubt, that he was happier in his chains, than his persecutors in the palace. Shall we, then, be afraid of the consequences, to which a faithful discharge of our duty may expose us? No: let us revere our consciences, and dread the displeasure of God more than the frowns of the world. Let us openly avow our attachment to Christ, and our abhorrence of sin; nor dare to give up the truth in compliment to any man. For it were better to go down into a dungeon for righteousness' sake, than to enjoy the favour of princes, with the reproaches of our own minds, and a fear of the divine judgments.

It should seem, that John's disciples had free access to him during his confinement, and that he was solicitous to introduce them to a further acquaintance with the Saviour, to remove their suspicions, or to confirm them in their attachment to Him. On this principle, we apprehend, when he heard of the growing reputation and miraculous works of Jesus, he sent to him two of his beloved followers (not for his own satisfaction, but theirs) to enquire, whether or no he was the true Messiah *. Our Lord, probably knowing the purpose, gave a full answer to the question, by referring them to the wonders which he performed before them, in proof of his character, and then warned them to beware of entertaining prejudices against Him. May we learn from

* Mat. xi. 2—6. Luke vii. 18—23. See Bishop Atterbury's elegant sermon upon this subject, vol. iii. serm. 2.

John,

John, when we are quitting the world, to bear our testimony for Christ, to rejoice in the advancement of His kingdom, to direct our friends to Him, and labour to establish them in the knowledge and love of his name!

The last scene of this valuable life was most affecting. At a sumptuous feast in Herod's palace, the murder of John was contrived and accomplished. The king, being pleased with the graceful movements of Herodias's daughter, who entertained the company by her dancing, rashly promised with an oath, that he would grant her, whatever she would ask; and she, by her mother's instigation, petitioned for the head of the Baptist. This appeared to that shameless woman the most desirable gift in Herod's dominions; for she was fired with rage against the preacher, who had openly declared his abhorrence of her iniquitous conduct; and therefore, to satiate her malice, an executioner was immediately dispatched to the prison, where the good man perished by the hand of violence.

How mysterious are the ways of Providence, which permitted such a life to be cut short in the midst, and by means so ignominious! We are ready to expostulate with God concerning the wisdom and the justice of his proceedings: for, while the wicked triumph, and the righteous are oppressed, it may seem as if He had forsaken the earth, or took no care of his servants. What shall we say to cases, like this before us? Why doth He not plead the cause of the upright, and confound the purposes of his enemies? But we have no right to reply against Him. "He doeth all things well:" nor, in the end, shall any of his faithful people complain,

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though they may ſuffer bonds and impriſonment, or martyrdom itſelf, for their attachment to Him. We mourn for the cruel and premature death of the prophet; but to him the ſtroke could not be unwelcome, which inſtantly tranſmitted him from a gloomy dungeon to everlaſting glory.

His diſciples were not aſhamed to own their relation to their murdered maſter. They performed their laſt office to him, in burying his corpſe; and probably from that time they became followers of Jeſus. May his memory be dear to us, as it was to them! Whatever reproaches may attend the ſaints of God, living or dying, may we honour their names, and not be afraid to avow our eſteem for them!

You, who hate and perſecute the zealous ſervants of Chriſt, would have taken part with Herod and his aſſociates. But ah! conſider, with whom you would wiſh to be joined hereafter! Will you not deſire to have your portion with them, whom you now deſpiſe for their holy ſingularity? O ſeek, then, to poſſeſs their faith and love, their ſelfdenial and devotion. "Give diligence to make your calling and election ſure:" and you ſhall ſoon be, where the Baptiſt is, adoring your God and Saviour; and you ſhall there attain a higher degree of knowledge, ſanctity, bliſs, and glory, than what any of the moſt excellent characters are capable of enjoying upon earth.

We pray, therefore, with our Church,

"Almighty God, by whoſe providence thy ſervant John Baptiſt was wonderfully born, and ſent to prepare the

the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching, and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen *."

*, Collect for Saint John Baptist's day.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. I.

Importance of the character of Jesus—to be studied with prayer—and for the increase of holy affections—its originality—proofs of his existence—writers of his history competent and faithful. Consider, as an introduction, I. His pre-existence, II. His Deity, III. His incarnation, IV. Preparations made for him.

WE cannot but feel a suspicion and diffidence of ourselves, while we attempt to delineate the character of the Saviour. So great is its importance in every view; such a divine splendour and glory are cast around it; and so profound are the mysteries, with which it is connected; that our minds are filled with an awful reverence, when we draw near to contemplate: and we seem disposed rather to stand at a distance, in silent and devout admiration; for "we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness."

But the difficulty of the task should not discourage our humble, though weak, endeavours. Only let us undertake it with earnest supplication, that we may not "darken counsel by words without knowledge." In the study of every part of the sacred scriptures, we have continual

tinual need of prayer, that we may poſſeſs a juſt and ſpiritual diſcernment. But here eſpecially, while the Lord himſelf comes down from heaven, and paſſes by before us, we ſhould beg, that the veil may be removed from our minds, and that He, "who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, may ſhine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jeſus Chriſt *." The hiſtory of Ceſar or Alexander may be peruſed with indifference, or, if you pleaſe, with the ſeverity of criticiſm; but the hiſtory of the Son of God is no matter of idle amuſement or curious ſpeculation: for every thing here is wonderful, and deſigned to excite in us the devout affections of gratitude, love, and zeal.

A right apprehenſion of His character will conſtrain us to cry out with Simeon, in rapturous adoration, "Lord, now letteſt thou thy ſervant depart in peace,—for mine eyes have ſeen thy ſalvation †." Every proper view of Him will, alſo, produce a ſanctifying influence. For, "with open face, beholding as in a glaſs the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the ſame image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord ‡."

The moſt ſuperficial obſerver muſt allow, that the hiſtory of Jeſus is replete with wonders. Almoſt every circumſtance in it is uncommon, and unparalleled. He was born, He lived, ſuffered, and died, in a very different way from any other man. This originality of his character is a ſtrong preſumption in favour of his religion; becauſe no impoſtor ever did reſemble him, nor

* 2 Cor. iv. 6. † Luke ii. 29, 30. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

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is it probable, that ſuch a reſemblance would ever be pretended.

It is not our deſign to produce the many evidences, which might be offered, in ſupport and confirmation of our holy faith. But it may be noted briefly, that the proof of the whole depends on this ſingle fact, that there did really exiſt ſuch a perſon as Jeſus of Nazareth. And this is eſtabliſhed upon ſtronger teſtimony, than any other ſimilar fact can be. The declarations of many ancient Pagan writers put it beyond a doubt; and it is manifeſt, that the firſt and bittereſt oppoſers of the Goſpel never once denied it. It is alſo more clearly aſcertained by the propagation and continuance of Chriſtianity in the world. For whence did this ſyſtem take its riſe, or how could it have been ſupported, if there had never been ſuch a Teacher as Jeſus Chriſt?

But it is aſked, Are the records, which deſcribe his life and character, genuine accounts, and what may ſafely be relied on? The anſwer is obvious: the books of the New Teſtament have a more convincing evidence of their authenticity, than any other writings of the like ancient date. The hiſtory of our Lord is tranſmitted to us by thoſe, who poſſeſſed the moſt certain information upon the ſubject. The Evangeliſts, Matthew and John, were diſciples and conſtant attendants of Jeſus; Mark and Luke,* alſo, had the beſt opportunities of being acquainted with his actions and diſcourſes from the Apoſtles themſelves; the former, it is believed, being the companion of Saint Peter, as the latter was of Saint Paul. Theſe publiſhed their narrations very ſoon after the tranſactions which they relate,

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and in the midst of enemies; so that their accounts, if false, might, and no doubt would, have been denied and and confuted. But they have stood the test of ages; every attempt to overturn them, tends to confirm their authority the more. Indeed, their integrity appears by many indubitable marks. The manner of their writing is peculiar to themselves: for their artless simplicity is such as proves, that they did not contrive a system of their own. They delivered plain facts without disguise, and generally without any reflections, which might bias their readers; so that, from the circumstances fairly represented, we are left to draw the necessary conclusions for ourselves.

What, then, is their report concerning the great Founder of our religion? This is an extensive subject, which it will be our benefit, as it is our duty, to contemplate; for it will tend to excite the most devout affections in our hearts. We shall endeavour to draw the general outlines of this astonishing character; and, as an introduction to the subject, we shall point out some particulars, the knowledge and belief of which seem of great importance, in order that we may form right conceptions of the life of Christ. We consider, therefore,

I. His pre-existence. We do not enquire after any condition, in which we might be supposed to be placed, previous to our birth; for this, clearly, is our first state. But his appearance in human flesh is described by such expressions, as cannot be applied to any mere man, and prove that he was possessed of a glorious being, prior to his nativity. "He was sent into the world," as his

Father's messenger; "He came down from heaven," and took our nature, of his own accord; all which are mentioned as instances of his amazing condescension; but such they could not be, if his existence had commenced only at his incarnation. He speaks of himself as having "glory with the Father, before the world was," and Saint Paul asserts, that "he made himself of no reputation," or "emptied himself of his glory," that he might be obedient unto death *. And does not this language imply an antecedent state and dignity? Our life was not the effect of our choice; but he is represented as voluntarily entering upon that, which he had in common with us, to fulfil his own gracious purposes: and this very consideration lays us under unspeakable obligations of gratitude, love, and obedience to him. "Lo! I come," said he †, which expression denotes, that he possessed some other mode of being, before he was born of his virgin mother.

It was the Redeemer, who appeared and revealed himself to the Church in the Old Testament, by the name of Jehovah, and who is called "the Angel, in whom was the name of God," "the Angel of his presence ‡." He governed the world by his providence, before he took up his abode in it, ordering all things by his wisdom and power. Nay, he was the Creator both of heaven and earth, with all their various inhabitants, visible and invisible; "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast §." And do not these

* John xvii. 5. Phil. ii. 7. † Heb. x. 7.
‡ Exod. xxiii. 20, 21. Isa. lxiii. 9. Acts vii 38.
§ Col. i. 16, 17. Psal. xxxiii. 9.

things

things import, that he had an exiſtence, prior to that of every creature? It might ſeem ſtrange to ſearch for arguments in ſupport of this truth, if we were not ſurrounded by perſons, who will allow the Saviour nothing more than the properties of humanity. An error this, which ſtrikes at the foundation of our faith. For, if we accede to ſuch a ſentiment, we muſt either ſay, that ſin is not ſo offenſive to God as to require any great expiation (and therein we ſhould deny his righteous character and the ſanctions of his holy law), or elſe we muſt abandon our hopes of heaven, ſince no adequate atonement can have been made by a mere man like ourſelves; and therefore "we are yet in our ſins."

We have advanced but a little way in our ſubject, in aſſerting the pre-exiſtence of Jeſus. If we enquire, what was his former ſtate, what his attributes and glory, we ſhall find ourſelves obliged to maintain

II. His Deity. Not only did he partake of the perfections of the Godhead, in conſequence of his union with the Father, but he was in himſelf very and eternal God. If this be not granted, a conſiderable part of the cleareſt declarations of ſcripture, on which the doctrine is founded, muſt be either expreſsly contradicted, or, by an unhappy refinement of criticiſm, explained into nothing. It were eaſy to produce a multitude of texts, which prove the point in the moſt full and direct manner. But this would lead us too far from our purpoſe. It muſt, however, be noted, that if Chriſt be no more than a creature, though of a ſuperior order, or one exalted to be God merely for his office, the Bible appears too abſtruſe and difficult to be deſigned for common people,

and of all other books most dangerous and destructive; as being the cause of much idolatry, in the worship of the Son of God.

Suffice it in this place to refer to that sublime description of our Lord's person and dignity, which stands at the beginning of Saint John's Gospel, and is a proper introduction to the life and character of Jesus. It seems to have been the grand design of the Evangelist to vindicate the divine glory of our Redeemer, in opposition to those very errors, which then began to shew themselves, and have been only broached afresh by modern heretics. In what terms could he have delivered the doctrine more expressly, than he has done when he asserts, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God *?" It is obvious, that he speaks, not of a mere attribute, but of a real person; for he adds that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us †." He meant, therefore, to describe his beloved Master; and he has evidently applied to him the very same title of "the Word," and "the Word of God" in some other places ‡. Nor is it an unsuitable appellation; for, (not to insist on the import of the term Logos, as the wisdom, or the intellectual image of God) as our words discover the sentiments of our minds, so he has revealed the divine will, and declared the Father to us.

"He was in the beginning," not only at the first production of this world, but before the existence of any

* John i. 1, &c. † 14.
‡ 1 John i. 1. Rev. xix. 13.

creature.

creature. "He was with God," in the ſame ſtate of unlimited happineſs and glory, and one with JEHOVAH by an ineffable and myſterious union of nature. Nor was he raiſed to this exalted rank, by an act of peculiar favour; but he always poſſeſſed it, as of his own right, ſince "he was God," partaking of the perfections of Deity in all their ſulneſs. In confirmation of this, the Apoſtle aſcribes the origin of the univerſe to him: for "all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." And will it not be allowed, that "he, who built all things, is God *?" Some, indeed, have maintained, that in the formation of the world he acted by a delegated power, and not by his own eſſential Divinity. But how is this conſiſtent with Saint Paul's account, that "all things were created FOR HIM," as well as "by him," and that by him all things conſiſt †?" In what can he be inferior to Jehovah, who is not only the author, but the final cauſe, of all? Further, the Evangeliſt declares, that he had exiſtence in himſelf as its original ſource, from which the whole human race derive all their underſtanding, happineſs, and comfort. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men."

The ſplendour of his majeſty was in a great meaſure concealed, during his reſidence upon earth; but there were thoſe, who ſaw through the veil of his humanity; and they have borne a decided teſtimony. "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father ‡." This could not be any external luſtre; for

* Heb. iii. 4. † Col. i. 16, 17. ‡ John i. 14.

his

his condition was attended with circumstances of peculiar meanness, and, probably, he carried marks of affliction in his countenance. Yet he appeared, both from his words and works, to be One of superior dignity; for he spake and acted, in numerous instances, as Lord of the whole creation. There were some special seasons, when the brightness of the Deity broke forth upon his favoured attendants. These saw some part of the radiance of his majesty, when he was transfigured on the mount: they heard the voice, by which "he received from God the Father honour and glory *:" and they his chosen witnesses have declared that which they saw and heard; "shewing unto us that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto them †." The celestial spirits, also, who could not mistake his real character, were commanded to express their reverence of him. For when the Lord God "bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the Angels of God worship him ‡."

Let us, then, maintain the truth, which is clearly delivered, and fully confirmed to us; nor fear, on the testimony of the Apostles, to receive Jesus as "the Lord of glory ||." If even Angels bow before him with profound

* Matt. xvii. 1, &c. 2 Pet. i. 16, 17.
† 1 John i. 1—3. ‡ Heb. i. 6.

|| Many are the publications, in which the Apostolical testimony for the Divinity of Christ is admirably collected and stated. To those, who may not have leisure for the perusal of the works of Dr. Waterland, we might recommend "A short Defence of the Divinity of Christ," published at Leeds, price 3d. Jones's Catholic Doctrine

found adoration, who are we, that we should refuse to pay our homage to him? Let us enquire, Do we entertain worthy notions of him, or feel a suitable regard towards him? Do we render him the honour, due unto his name? It is possible to assent to his Divinity, in a mere speculative way, while the heart remains insensible to his excellence, and disaffected to his service. Accordingly, many call him, "Lord, Lord," who see no beauty in him, that they should desire him, and who do not the things which he says *.

But to form a right judgment of the character of Jesus, we must take a different view, and observe how he gives us access unto himself. The glory of his essential and unveiled Deity would dazzle our sight. But we are encouraged to draw near; while we are assured, that he is IMMANUEL, "God with us," or, God in our nature; "God manifest in the flesh." Hence we consider

III. His incarnation. Various and opposite errors have prevailed, respecting the person of Christ; some denying him Divinity, others humanity. We believe, that they were both truly united in him, and that he was very God, as well as very man. Here, indeed, many objections are raised. Such an assumption of the manhood, it is said, is unintelligible, unnecessary, and impossible. Alas! to what impiety may we be led by our own

Doctrine of the Trinity," &c. If the learned reader wish to see the testimony of the primitive Church, in addition to that of the Apostles, the writings of Bishop Bull, particularly his "Defensio fidei Nicænæ," and "Bp. Horsley's Tracts in controversy with Dr. Priestley," are deserving of his regard.

* Luke vi. 46.

own pride and preſumption! There are thoſe, who will not allow any thing to Jehovah, which exceeds their own ſcanty comprehenſion, and, without regarding his expreſs declarations, arrogantly determine, that it is not proper or poſſible for him to exiſt and act in any other way, than what they themſelves underſtand, and even preſcribe for him; and then they dignify their conceits with the name of "Rational Religion."

If it be aſked, how this union between two natures ſo diſtant could be effected, we pretend not to explain the manner; for it is not explained to us. And, indeed, there is no ſubject, even relating to ourſelves, in which, if we enter into curious ſpeculations, and would unravel every difficulty, we might not be ſoon embarraſſed confounded, and obliged to confeſs our ignorance. And ſhall we, who know nothing clearly about the mode of our own being, undertake to ſay, of what the great and glorious God may be capable? The fact is clearly eſtabliſhed: it is declared, "the Word," who was in the beginning, with God, and was God,—"was made fleſh." He partook of all our infirmities (ſin only excepted), being ſubject to the ſame ſenſations, fatigues, pains, and temptations, as any the weakeſt of our ſpecies. He was, therefore, as truly man, as if he had poſſeſſed no higher nature. This will be ſufficiently manifeſt, while we deſcribe the various circumſtances of his life.

We allow, then, that there is a ſenſe, in which the Son is inferior to the Father; for, as his ſervant, he is ſent by him, receives his commiſſion from him, and to him likewiſe owes his exaltation. But expreſſions of

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that kind, which are frequent in the ſcriptures, by no means contradict the doctrine here maintained; for they are uſed only with a reference to his manhood, or his mediatorial office, in which it is granted that he was in a ſtate of ſubjection. The incarnation being admitted, the Bible ſpeaks a conſiſtent language, reſpecting the Redeemer; whereas, otherwiſe, it would be at variance with itſelf.

This humiliation of Jeſus is repreſented as a neceſſary, or at leaſt a ſuitable, and expedient, ſcheme. "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren *." In his humanity alone, he was capable of obeying and ſuffering for us: in this alone, he could ſuſtain the character of "a merciful High-prieſt," and be "touched with a feeling of our infirmities." Thus the ſame nature, which ſinned, atoned for the tranſgreſſion, and repaired the breach. Hereby we draw near to God, and God to us: He ſtoops to us, and we riſe to Him: our IMMANUEL joins heaven and earth together. Of how great importance, and how replete with conſolation, is the doctrine before us!

It is "the man Chriſt Jeſus," who is propoſed as our pattern; for, in the peculiar exertions of his Divinity, he is not exhibited as an example to us. In him, then, Humanity is glorioufly exalted; and by an union with, and a reſemblance of, him, we ſhall attain the higheſt dignity, of which our ſpecies is capable. O let us pray, that we may ſo contemplate his excellence, as to become more and more conformed to his likeneſs!

* Heb. ii. 17.

We might conclude, that the object was great indeed, for which a person of such eminence condescended to take up his abode on the earth. We shall draw the same conclusion from considering

IV. The preparations made for his appearance. Upon a slight view of the subject, we must suppose, that he was about to carry into execution some scheme of immense magnitude and importance. An expectation of his coming had been raised in the minds of men for four thousand years. His introduction into the world, therefore, was not a sudden event, nor a design formed in haste. Every circumstance had been foreseen and declared, nay, appointed from eternity; the everlasting counsels of Jehovah had determined it; the course of divine Providence had been directed to it; and, probably, the earth itself created for it. The grand purpose of his incarnation was revealed immediately after the fall; and the Church had been taught to trust and rejoice in his atonement, even before his appearance, as it has done since that period, and will do to the end of time.

It is asked, "Why was his coming delayed so long, if indispensably necessary? or, why not longer, if not wanted before?" These are ignorant and presumptuous questions. For who are we, that we should require the God of heaven to justify to us the wisdom and propriety of his dispensations? We should adore and embrace the mercy, which is offered to us through the Saviour, rather than dispute about it. His manifestation in the flesh, no doubt, was seasonable: nay, the scripture asserts, that he died "in due time," and that he

came "in the fulneſs of time *." Some reaſons may be aſſigned, why the great event did not take place ſooner:

1. That the neceſſity of redemption might be more clearly perceived; and that our condition without ſuch an interpoſition might be proved to be abſolutely deſperate. The Lord ſuffered men to walk in the way of their own hearts, in order to evince their extreme and total depravity, the blindneſs of their underſtandings, the perverſeneſs of their wills, and their utter inability to reſtore themſelves. For if we poſſeſs any wiſdom, ſtrength, or goodneſs, ſufficient to effect our own recovery, how ſtrange that no approach was made towards it for four thouſand years! A full trial, ſurely, was allowed; but during all that time the ignorance, degeneracy, and wickedneſs of the world ſeemed to increaſe. It appears, then, from undoubted fact, that, left to ourſelves, we ſhould never have obtained reconciliation with God, and that without Chriſt we are "ready to periſh." O let us profit by this ſad experience, and learn to value our Saviour the more!

2. That a long ſeries of clear and circumſtantial prophecies might be delivered, and fulfilled in him. This was a wiſe and gracious appointment; for the Goſpel has thereby received an abundant ſtrength of evidence. It pleaſed God, in almoſt every age from the beginning, to raiſe up and inſpire faithful men, to proclaim the coming of a Redeemer, and to deſcribe his character and office. Accordingly, they foretold, with

* Rom. v. 6. Gal. iv. 4.

an aſtoniſhing exactneſs, his birth, life, and death, and the various incidents relating to them; and from their united teſtimony, compared with that of the Evangeliſts, we are furniſhed with inconteſtable arguments in ſupport of the truth. They "ſpake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt," and have left us no reaſonable cauſe to doubt, that JESUS is the CHRIST.

3. That preparations might be made by the divine Providence for his reception, and for the ready propagation of the Goſpel. The Lord God, in all his preceding diſpenſations, had a regard to the intended incarnation of the Saviour. All other circumſtances were appointed in ſubſerviency to that event, which exceeds, in magnitude and importance, every occurrence in the hiſtory of mankind. It is obvious to all, who examine the ſacred records, that this was the caſe throughout the whole economy of the Jews; and from the ſame authority we learn, that the ſtate of the heathen world, and all their great empires, were ſo ordered as to make way for "the Prince of peace *." One dominion gave place to another, by the wiſe and ſovereign diſpoſal of God, till, at the birth of our Lord, the Romans had extended their power to every known part of the earth, and thus opened a communication for ſpreading the Goſpel amongſt the moſt diſtant nations. At that period, alſo, an univerſal tranquillity prevailed, which was moſt uncommon and almoſt unprecedented, emblematical of that kingdom, then about to be eſtabliſhed, and intended to be the means of introducing it. Thus

* Dan. ii. & vii.

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every thing was accommodated to the purpoſe, when Jeſus, "the Deſire of all nations *," appeared.

We ſhall ſoon have occaſion to remark, that the bleſſed inhabitants above were not unconcerned in this event. Angels deſcended to announce his coming; and a multitude of them, with their heavenly ſongs, declared and celebrated his nativity. John the Baptiſt, alſo, we have ſeen, his illuſtrious Harbinger, was ſent with an expreſs commiſſion to prepare his way, and to proclaim his dignity and grace.

We need not add more. From the concurrence of theſe various circumſtances, we perceive ſome vaſt deſign to be in agitation, to which the attention both of heaven and earth is directed.

The ſubject before us will furniſh us with an intereſting application to different characters.

1. You, who love the Saviour, or who feel your need of him, draw near, that you may admire his excellency and perfection. How great is his glory! How aſtoniſhing his condeſcenſion! How rich, and free, and extenſive is his mercy! How firm the Covenant, which he hath ſealed with his blood, and confirmed by his oath! Let us join our teſtimony, and ſay, that he is "full of grace and truth." Is there not enough in him, to diſpel your fears, to encourage and enliven your hopes? And will not the belief of what he has done for you conſtrain you to devote yourſelves to him? You know him not, unleſs you feel an irreſiſtible force in this argument. Do you eſteem the world, then, poor

* Hagg. ii. 7.

and worthleſs, in compariſon of Chriſt? O turn away your eyes from beholding vanity! Come, and contemplate his perfect beauty, till you can ſay, he is to me "the chiefeſt among ten thouſand, and altogether lovely *."

2. You, who glory in yourſelves, and not in the Saviour, who depend not upon his merit but your own, conſider what you are doing. What a contempt do you ſhew for this divine perſon, and his gracious undertaking! You act, as if all this wondrous plan had been entirely needleſs. For if your moral qualities and works of righteouſneſs be ſufficient to recommend you to the favour of Heaven, then doubtleſs the incarnation, as well as the death of Chriſt, was vain †. Then the counſels of God have been employed about a fruitleſs deſign; and his Providence has been contriving and executing an abſurd, becauſe an uſeleſs, ſcheme. But this you would not aſſert. And, if you allow the neceſſity of ſuch an interpoſition, how wretched, how deſperate muſt be your caſe, which required it! Let the conviction have its proper influence! Under a ſenſe of your guilt, bow before the Redeemer, and implore the benefits of his ſalvation: "Lord ſave us; we periſh ‡!"

3. You, who are deſpiſers of Chriſt, or who diſregard, at leaſt, the important doctrine of his manifeſtation in the fleſh, conſider the grounds of your objections or your inattention to it. We entreat your

* Sol. Song v. 10, 16. † Gal. ii. 21.
‡ Matt. viii. 25.

ſerious

ſerious examination of theſe things; and aſk, why you ſhould turn away your ears from them. You are curious to hear what is uncommon and wonderful; eager to read any eventful hiſtory of men and empires; and always at leiſure to liſten to the trifling news of the day. And is there nothing in this ſubject, which deſerves your notice? Or how can you acquit yourſelves of the moſt conſummate folly, if you are indifferent about it?

But your neglect of the Saviour ariſes not ſo much from weakneſs of underſtanding, as from a rooted depravity of heart. You know, that he is an enemy to your pride, ſenſuality, covetouſneſs, and reſentment; and therefore you wiſh not for any acquaintance with him. "You love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe your deeds are evil; neither will you come to the light, leſt your deeds ſhould be reproved *." Here, then, we ſee the real cauſe of your infidelity: but is this, what you will juſtify?

We warn you, that theſe are not matters of a trifling nature, but of infinite moment. The Lord God hath ſpoken to you by his Son,—"the brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon †;" and he will be heard, or you ſhall anſwer it at your peril. He yet continues to addreſs you in terms of love and mercy: but if you reject or ſlight his offers, wo be unto you, that the Son of God is come. This aggravates your guilt, and renders your deſtruction certain and unſpeakably tremendous. "He

* John iii. 19, 20.

† Heb. i. 1—3.

that believeth not is condemned already, becauſe he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God *."

May we know the day of our viſitation; and, exulting in the glory and the grace of Jeſus, may we each of us cry out with a holy tranſport, "Behold, GOD is my ſalvation: I will truſt and not be afraid; for the LORD JEHOVAH is my ſtrength and my ſong: he alſo is become my ſalvation †!" Amen.

* John iii. 18. † Iſa. xii. 2.

JESUS

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 2.

The humiliation and glory of Jeſus contraſted. I. *His miraculous conception—announced to the Virgin Mary, and to Joſeph.* II. *His nativity—at Bethlehem—in a ſtable—declared by an angel to ſhepherds—celebrated by a multitude of the heavenly hoſt—enquired after and publiſhed by the ſhepherds.* III. *His childhood and education—circumciſion—preſentation in the temple—teſtimony of Simeon and Anna concerning him—viſited by eaſtern Magi—preſerved in Egypt—conducted to Nazareth—diſtinguiſhed for his ſuperior wiſdom—diſcourſed with the doctors in the temple—dwelt in ſubjection to his parents at Nazareth.*

It was an aſtoniſhing event, that the glorious Perſonage, who is called "the Word of God," "was made fleſh, and dwelt among us." But our wonder is increaſed, when we conſider the circumſtances of his appearance and abode on the earth. They were ſuch as we ſhould have thought unſuitable to his dignity; inaſmuch as there was no diſplay of external ſplendour, which could excite the notice of the world. "He had no form nor comelineſs," ſuch as men admire; and

" there was no beauty" in him, which would induce a carnal heart " to desire him." Had the whole contrivance of this amazing plan been left to us, we should, probably, have ordered matters very differently, and have had, not a poor, despised, suffering Redeemer, but, what the Jews wished for, a temporal Messiah, who should possess supreme dominion, dazzle the eyes of every observer by his pomp and magnificence, and constrain all the nations of the earth to bow with unfeigned subjection to him. It was otherwise appointed by the unerring wisdom of God; and, so far from being offended at the mean appearance of Jesus, we should contemplate with profound adoration the gracious purposes of it.

Yet it is said, " we beheld his glory *." There resided a glory in him, which his people discovered, and which sometimes broke forth to the confusion of his enemies; a glory far superior to all the grandeur of conquerors and kings. Indeed, there was a wonderful contrast in the various circumstances, which attended the Saviour's abode on earth: for the most exalted dignity and the deepest abasement were united in him. Such a Messiah the ancient prophecies describe, and therefore such an one the Jews ought to have expected. They might have learned, that " the holy One of Israel," and the afflicted, suffering Messiah was the same Redeemer. May all our prejudices against him be removed; and, while we hear of his coming in the flesh, may we be disposed to receive him into our hearts,

* John i. 14.

and

and with loud hoſannas welcome his approach, crying, "Bleſſed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hoſanna in the higheſt!" We conſider, for the preſent,

I. His miraculous conception. This, as well as ſome other incidents preceding his nativity, demands our regard. We have already ſeen, that the providence of God had made great preparations for him, and that the various predictions of the inſpired writers had raiſed among the Jews a general expectation of a glorious Deliverer. Thoſe, who ſtudied the ſacred oracles, and carefully obſerved the ſtate of their nation, could not but perceive, that the exact period marked out both by Jacob and Daniel for the appearance of SHILOH, MESSIAH, THE PRINCE, muſt be near at hand *. They were, therefore, "looking for redemption in Iſrael," and at laſt they obtained the object of their hope. At the appointed ſeaſon, "in the fulneſs of time," the Saviour was announced.

But who was the favoured inſtrument of bringing him into the world? It had been declared, that he was to be "the Son of David according to the fleſh," and therefore that he ſhould be born of ſome deſcendant of that king of Iſrael. But he was likewiſe to be the Son of God; for he muſt be "holy, harmleſs, undefiled, ſeparate from ſinners †:" and, that the corruption of our fallen nature might not be communicated to him, he muſt be conceived, and his body produced, in a very different way from any other man. It was accordingly

* Gen. xlix. 10. Dan. ix. 25. † Heb vii. 26.

provided

provided in the divine counſels, and foretold by the prophet Iſaiah, that " a VIRGIN ſhould conceive and bear a ſon, and ſhould call his name IMMANUEL *."

Let Infidels cavil as they pleaſe, and ſtrain their ingenuity to invent objections to this ſcheme, and repreſent the whole as abſurd and impoſſible, we will ſtill admire the power and wiſdom of God in it, and maintain, that He, who originally " formed man of the duſt of the ground," could by this, or any other expedient which he ſhould chooſe, prepare a ſpotleſs body for the reſidence of his own Son.

A pious female of the houſe and lineage of David, eſpouſed, but not then joined in marriage, to Joſeph a deſcendant of the ſame family, Mary the bleſſed virgin, was appointed to be the mother of the Saviour: an honour, which many holy women in Iſrael had aſpired to, for ages before †. Both ſhe and her expected huſband were placed in a mean ſituation; but they poſſeſſed a peculiar excellency of character, and obtained the notice of heaven. The Lord paſſed by the mighty, the noble, and the learned of the earth, and poured contempt upon all worldly pageantry, when he ſubmitted to appear in the loweſt rank, and to be born of ſo poor and obſcure a perſon. Yet, even upon that occaſion, his dignity and glory were diſplayed. One of the higheſt order of the celeſtial ſpirits, Gabriel, was commiſſioned to inform the pious Virgin of the counſels of God concerning her, and to declare the name and the office of that illuſtrious offspring, which ſhe was to pro-

* Iſa. vii. 14.

† Luke i. 26—36.

duce

duce by a miraculous conception through the energy of the Holy Ghoſt. "Behold," ſaid he, "thou ſhalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and ſhalt call his name JESUS. He ſhall be great, and ſhall be called the Son of the Higheſt; and the Lord God ſhall give unto him the throne of his father David: and He ſhall reign over the houſe of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there ſhall be no end."

Intelligence of this ſupernatural effect, which immediately took place, was not long afterwards given by a heavenly meſſenger to Joſeph the betrothed huſband of Mary *. He had perceived her pregnancy, and, not knowing the cauſe, could not but ſuſpect her integrity, and therefore wiſhed to break off his engagements with her. To relieve him from his anxiety, the angel explained her real ſituation, encouraged him to receive her as his wife, and directed him to call the child, whom ſhe ſhould bear, by the ſignificant name of JESUS, denoting his office as the SAVIOUR, and the deliverance from ſin, which he accompliſhes for his people. Thus Joſeph became his reputed father; for, agreeably to the divine mandate, "he took unto him Mary his wife." But the conception was immaculate; as "he knew her not till ſhe had brought forth her firſt-born Son."

Here, then, we contemplate the Son of God, "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that are under the law †." This is "the Seed of the woman," who was appointed to bruiſe the ſer-

* Mat. i. 18—25. † Gal. iv. 4, 5.

pent's

pent's head *." This is "the Seed of Abraham," in whom it is promiſed, that "all the nations of the earth ſhall be bleſſed †." This is that illuſtrious progeny of David, of whom it was declared, that "the throne of his kingdom ſhall be eſtabliſhed for ever ‡." Peculiar care is taken by the Evangeliſts, to prove, that in this, as well as every other reſpect, he fulfilled the ancient predictions. Accordingly, Saint Matthew records his genealogy from David and from Abraham, by the ſide of Joſeph his reputed father; and Saint Luke traces his origin not only from David, but from Adam, in the line of Mary his real mother §.

Are we ſuitably affected by the myſterious truth, which we maintain, that Jeſus, who was the Lord of David, became his Son ‖? The conception of the Saviour was the moſt aſtoniſhing event, which had ever been known upon the earth before. The firſt formation of the world may juſtly excite our wonder: but that is really nothing in compariſon of the incarnation, when the Creator ſtooped to be a creature. What power, what condeſcenſion, what grace are diſplayed in it! It ſhould not be forgotten, that it was "for us men and for our ſalvation, He, by whom all things were made, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghoſt, of the Virgin Mary, and was made man."

* Gen. iii. 15. † Gen. xxii. 18. ‡ 2 Sam. vii. 13.

§ The accounts of the two Evangeliſts are thus eaſily reconciled, by allowing, that Joſeph, whom St. Luke calls "the ſon of Heli," was his adopted ſon, or ſon-in-law, by marrying his daughter Mary.

‖ Mat. xxii. 45.

man *." Let us ſtudy the ſubject, not with the cold indifference of curioſity or ſpeculation, but with humble and devout affections, till we feel the fire of divine love burning within us, and conſtraining us to ſing aloud with Mary, "My ſoul doth magnify the Lord, and my ſpirit hath rejoiced in GOD MY SAVIOUR †." We proceed to conſider

II. His nativity. All things, it ſhould ſeem, were in a ſtate of readineſs and preparation for his introduction into the world, excepting one circumſtance. An ancient prophecy had determined, that the Meſſiah ſhould be born in Bethlehem; and Mary dwelt at Nazareth, which was at no ſmall diſtance from it ‡. How, then, ſhall that ſcripture be fulfilled? The providence of God can eaſily remove the greateſt apparent difficulties, and, in a myſterious way, make all creatures ſubſervient to his own purpoſes. We do not obſerve, that Mary contrived or wiſhed to change her reſidence with a view to the prediction; for, probably, that was not attended to at the time. But the mind of a heathen prince, though he acted only from political motives, was influenced to accompliſh this event. The Roman Emperor Auguſtus, became the inſtrument of performing the divine counſels ‖. For, in conſequence of a general enrolment of all the inhabitants of Judea, which he had commanded, they were obliged to repair to the place, where the original inheritance of their

* Nicene Creed. † Luke i. 46, 47.
‡ Mic. v. 2. Mat. ii. 5. John vii. 42. ‖ Luke ii. 1, &c.

families lay. Joſeph and Mary, then, in obedience to the edict, went to Bethlehem, the city of David, as being his deſcendants, where their names were to be regiſtered: and, during their continuance in that town, for ſo it had been ordered by the appointment of Heaven, the proper ſeaſon of her delivery came.

But what do we behold? The Redeemer of the world deſtitute of an accommodation upon his firſt entrance into it! We might have ſuppoſed, that the palaces of kings would have thrown wide their gates to admit the illuſtrious Viſitant. But he ſought not the notice of courts; and he obtained not a favourable reception even at an inn. For ſuch was the low condition of his holy mother, that ſhe was obliged to abide in a ſtable during the very pangs of childbirth, and to lay the Firſt-born of the whole creation in a manger.

Let not, then, the followers of the Lamb be anxious about their preſent circumſtances, conſidering the mean and ignoble ſtate in which their Lord appeared. It is probable, that the pooreſt of them meet with better accommodations than he did. Yet do we not diſcover in ſome an eagerneſs, which is unſuitable to their character, to procure the pomps and vanities of the world; and in others, a peeviſh diſcontent becauſe they cannot obtain them? Surely you are not conformed to Jeſus Chriſt, if his birth has not taught you to look with indifference on the ſplendour of the great, and to be ſatisfied with the loweſt ſituation. Do "ye know the grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that though he was rich, yet for your ſakes he became poor, that ye through his

his poverty might be rich * ?" You muſt learn from this example to reſtrain your deſires, and to " be content with ſuch things as ye have †."

Kings and princes of the world knew nothing of that illuſtrious Perſonage, who then condeſcended to be an inhabitant of the earth: but the bleſſed ſpirits above contemplated the event with aſtoniſhment, and came down, as his attendants, to celebrate his nativity with their rapturous ſongs. They diſcovered a generous and diſintereſted joy on our account, while they exulted in the appearance of the Redeemer, and recommended him to our regard. We can form no conceptions of their feelings on that occaſion, when they perceived him, the object of their worſhip, in the form of an helpleſs infant, and as an outcaſt from men, whom he was about to ſave. One of this celeſtial order was commiſſioned to proclaim his birth, as " good tidings of great joy, which ſhould be to all people," and to declare his high character, as " the Saviour, who is Chriſt the Lord." But to whom was the information given? Not to the great Emperor of the world, nor to any of his nobles, but to a company of poor ſhepherds, who " abode in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night." An intimation this, that a proper attention to temporal concerns will not unfit us for the reception of divine knowledge, and that, in a faithful diſcharge of the duties of our ſtation, we have moſt reaſon to expect the gracious communications of God to our ſouls.

* 2 Cor. viii. 9. † Heb. xiii. 5.

Nor was there one Angel only employed on the occasion; for immediately "a multitude of the heavenly host" brake forth into a chorus of praise, exulting in the restoration of our fallen race, and admiring the perfections of Jehovah as exhibited therein; "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." They needed not the grace which "came by Jesus Christ," but they have taught us to join in songs of grateful adoration, for the salvation which is brought unto us. Have we adopted their anthem? Do we magnify and exalt the name of our God, while we see the various attributes of his nature displayed and harmonized in the wondrous plan of redemption? WE, surely, have abundant cause to cry aloud, "Glory to God in the highest;" because "peace" with all its attendant blessings may now be established "on earth," inasmuch as He, whom we have provoked, has declared "good will towards men." Those only will refuse to sing, who despise and reject the offer of reconciliation with Heaven.

What effect, then, should these "good tidings of great joy" produce in your minds? How did the shepherds receive them? They delayed not to enquire after the new-born Saviour; they went with haste to Bethlehem, where they found the report concerning him to be true. The information, also, which had astonished them, they communicated to others, and gave praise to the God of Israel, who had manifested to them such peculiar mercy. And shall not you, who hear so frequently of the coming of Jesus Christ, desire to know him? Will you refuse to give an immediate attention

to

to the meſſage of the Goſpel? What is there of equal importance? Will you not examine, at leaſt, the intelligence which is brought you? The facts are ſo well authenticated, that they will bear the moſt exact ſcrutiny.

If, like the ſhepherds, you are convinced of the truth of the report, you will alſo direct the notice of others to this wonderful event. You will take up your words and ſay, "We have ſeen, and do teſtify, that the Father hath ſent the Son to be the Saviour of the world *." You will bear witneſs of his worth and excellence to all around you, and call upon them to admire and praiſe him, who in your view "is altogether lovely." And whether they regard your teſtimony or no, you will adore the divine goodneſs in having "laid help for you upon One that is mighty," and bleſs the God of all grace, who in remembrance of his Covenant hath brought redemption to his people. If you wiſh to conceal your religion, we may preſume that you conſider it as an inſignificant and uſeleſs thing, and therefore that you are ſtrangers to the real character of Chriſt. A ſpiritual manifeſtation of his glory would excite in you the moſt ardent affections of gratitude, love, and zeal, diſpoſe you to recommend him to others, and conſtrain you to "magnify the God of Iſrael."

In purſuing the hiſtory of Jeſus, we conſider

III. His childhood and education. We are loſt in aſtoniſhment, while we contemplate Him, who is "the Lord from heaven," in all the weakneſs of infancy,

* 1 John iv. 14.

requiring a mother's watchful care, and carried in a nurse's arms. He passed through the various stages of human life, and experienced every infirmity, to which we are subject, sin only excepted.

As he was "made of a woman," that he might be obedient to the law *, he submitted to all the Mosaic rites, and accordingly was circumcised on the eighth day. At the appointed time, also, he was presented to the Lord by his parents in the temple at Jerusalem, and even redeemed, as the divine precept required †. He came "to fulfil all righteousness;" and has taught us, by his example, not to despise or neglect the ordinances of God, though, as external observances, they may seem unprofitable and vain.

We have remarked, that the blessed Angels joined in concert to celebrate his nativity: and now we shall perceive, that there were not wanting chosen witnesses among the inhabitants of the earth, whose voice should more publicly and more widely proclaim the consecrated infant. When, therefore, he was presented to God according to those ancient prophecies, "The desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory;" and "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple ‡;" Simeon, an aged saint, who "waited for the consolation of Israel," through the immediate influence of the Spirit attended at the solemnity, and made known the event. He embraced the holy infant in his arms, and cried out, with the most devout and

* Gal. iv 4. † Exod. xiii. 2. Num. viii. 16, 17. xviii. 15, 16. ‡ Hag. ii. 7. Mal. iii. 1.

lively

lively ſentiments of faith, love, and joy, " Lord, now letteſt thou thy ſervant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have ſeen thy ſalvation." He foretold alſo the different effects of his appearance, obſerving, that it would excite general oppoſition, and, though to ſome it would be the means of a happy reſtoration, would bring upon many final and aggravated ruin. Another perſon, likewiſe, a pious female, far advanced in years, confirmed the teſtimony. " One Anna, a propheteſs, coming in that inſtant, gave thanks unto the Lord, and ſpake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jeruſalem."

How much may we learn from this account! Is it not as neceſſary for us, as for the ancient Jews, to look for redemption? And ſhall we not feel and expreſs the moſt ardent gratitude and joy for the revelation of the Meſſiah? Though we are not favoured with a ſight of his bodily preſence, yet, if by faith we behold his glory, we alſo ſhall ſmile at the proſpect of death, and be ſatisfied to cloſe our eyes upon every earthly object. But alas! is not Jeſus, according to the prediction, " a ſign," which is every where " ſpoken againſt?" To how many is he " a ſtone of ſtumbling and rock of offence!" Even to this day, by the preaching of his Goſpel, " the thoughts of many hearts are revealed;" for therein he affords a teſt or trial of men's characters and diſpoſitions. The humble penitent is comforted by the declarations of his abundant grace; the ſenſualiſt diſcovers his own vile affections, while he determines that he will not follow Chriſt; and the Phariſee betrays his

pride and hypocrisy, in refusing "to submit to the righteousness of God."

A further honour was put upon the infant Saviour, and his glory displayed in distant lands. A new and miraculous star was lighted up in the heavens; and we may be allowed to consider it as an intimation, that "the star of Jacob" was then rising upon this dark world. Some pious sages in a remote eastern country observed it, and by revelation, as it is reasonable to believe, understood the signal *. Immediately they took their journey with great pains and expense to themselves, to enquire for and to worship this illustrious Personage, who was born to reign over the Jews. They were conducted by the guidance of the star, first to Jerusalem, and then to the very house at Bethlehem, where the young child was. There they fell down before him in profound adoration, and presented him with various oblations of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When, by the divine direction, they had returned to their own land, doubtless they published the advent of the Savior, according to the information they had received, and prepared the way for the reception of the Gospel amongst their countrymen. These venerable sages, then, were as the first fruits of the Gentiles, and a token of the future enlargement of the Church by the accession of distant nations, who should "soon stretch out their hands unto God †." Thus it had been predicted, "The forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee: the multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of

* Mat. ii. 1, &c.

† Psal. lxviii. 31.

Midian

Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba ſhall come: they ſhall bring gold and incenſe; and they ſhall ſhew forth the praiſes of the Lord *."

Are we not hereby reproved for our neglect and contempt of Chriſt? His manifeſtation in the fleſh is declared among us, if not by a ſtar in the heavens, yet by many credible witneſſes; but how few enquire after him! How few are willing to forego their eaſe and intereſt; how few, who would not grudge the pains and expenſe of theſe wiſe men, to attain the knowledge of ſalvation! Why are we not, like them, worſhipping at the feet of Jeſus? Why do we not offer to him, out of our treaſures, ſome mark of adoration and gratitude? Why are not all our talents, and all our faculties of body and ſoul, devoted to him? For, as he requires, ſo he is worthy to receive, this ſervice at our hands.

But, though ſuch honours were done to Jeſus in his very infancy, a violent perſecution aroſe againſt him, and his life was preſerved only through the divine interpoſition. The cruel tyrant Herod, alarmed by the account of the Magi, as if the new born king for whom they enquired were to poſſeſs temporal dominion, came to the horrid reſolution of deſtroying him. At firſt he pretended veneration, and a deſire to worſhip him, with a view to accompliſh his murderous deſigns. But the Lord God, who knew the hypocriſy of his heart, defeated his intention, by preventing the wiſe men from carrying him any intelligence. Unwilling to relinquiſh his purpoſe, and enraged by the diſappointment, with

* Iſa. lx. 5, 6.

great

great barbarity he commanded all the young children throughout the neighbourhood of Bethlehem to be put to death. Still Jesus was secure under an invincible defence; nor was it possible that the end of his appearing should be frustrated. The Lord directed Joseph to seek a retreat in Egypt, and there the holy family abode till the death of the tyrant.

Why do we "fear the fury of the oppressor?" For "where is the fury of the oppressor?" How vain and foolish the projects of the wisest politicians; how weak the efforts of the most powerful monarchs, against God! He will defend his Church, and provide a sure refuge for his children in times of danger. Egypt itself, which had formerly been the seat of violent persecution, shall, whenever he pleases, afford protection and security to his people.

So early did the sufferings of Jesus commence; and, through his whole life, he was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." As he advanced in age and stature, he discovered marks of extraordinary abilities; being "strong in spirit, filled with wisdom," and endued with "the grace of God" in an eminent degree. We apprehend, that his uncommon fervour, knowledge, and piety, even, in his childhood, excited the admiration of the neighbourhood where he dwelt. We have but little information concerning that period, but the few circumstances, which are recorded, must not be disregarded.

When he was twelve years old (and therefore according to the Jewish custom was made subject to the law), he went up to the temple with his pious parents to celebrate the passover; and upon that occasion he

ſhewed the moſt zealous attachment to the houſe and ſervice of God. His parents and relations were returning home, while, unknown to them, he ſtill remained at Jeruſalem. After a painful ſearch, they found him on the third day amongſt the public teachers of religion, liſtening to their inſtructions, requeſting anſwers to his enquiries, and by his profound underſtanding in divine things exciting the aſtoniſhment of all who were preſent. When his mother had expreſſed her wonder at his conduct, as having occaſioned them many anxious fears, he replied, with a zeal far beyond his years, "Wiſt ye not, that I muſt be about my Father's buſineſs?" Yet he did not renounce his obedience to Joſeph and Mary, or deſpiſe them on account of his own ſuperior rank or abilities; but, with all filial regard and ſubmiſſion to their authority, he went down to dwell with them at Nazareth. There alſo he continued to exhibit, with his increaſing age and ſtature, an increaſing meaſure of wiſdom and excellency of character; for his human nature received gradual communications from the fulneſs of the Godhead.

Here, then, we have an example, which may be propoſed to all; the example of a child, which may reprove and ſhame the moſt advanced in life. It more eſpecially, however, demands the attention of young perſons; therefore we call upon ſuch to contemplate the amiable and holy conduct of Jeſus at that early period. Do not the ſame diſpoſitions, which he poſſeſſed, become you alſo? And do you, who are only twelve years old, acknowledge your obligations to worſhip God and frequent his ordinances? Is the houſe and ſervice of God your

your delight? Jesus undertook a long journey, and, after he had spent many days together in waiting upon God, seemed unwilling to leave the sacred courts. But do not you think the least trouble, for any religious purposes, more than enough; and the shortest time too long? Have you not said, "What a weariness is it? When will the Sabbath be gone?" Are the grand subjects of divine revelation your study, or the matter of your humble and diligent enquiry? Do you listen with eagerness to the instructions of your teachers; and would you gladly embrace an opportunity of conversing with them for your own edification? Have you considered, that you also, as well as Jesus, should "be about your Father's business?" Or are you consulting His will, and seeking His glory? Ah! how different are the greater part of our young people! What ignorance and contempt of God, what a profane neglect of his house, his word, and ministers, do we discover in them!

If the ordinances of religion be despised, we need not wonder that domestic duties are disregarded. If you feel no reverence towards God, it is not probable that you will honour your father and your mother. And is not your deportment in the family very opposite to that of Jesus? He might have commanded more than twelve legions of Angels to attend and obey him; yet he submitted to his poor parents, content to live with them in their state of meanness and indigence, and, probably, to labour also in the common occupation of a carpenter for his support. But have we not occasion to lament in you an obstinacy of spirit, a contempt of authority, a supercilious behaviour, and an aversion to all

habits

habits of induſtry? You increaſe in age and ſtature; but do you at the ſame time advance, as Jeſus did, in every thing excellent and lovely? Such an improvement, it muſt be allowed, would be the ſource of happineſs to yourſelves, as well as comfort to your parents, and would render you a bleſſing to ſociety, and an ornament to the profeſſion of the Goſpel. Study, then, the example of Chriſt, till by the grace of God you admire and reſemble Him. He, who has exhibited himſelf as the pattern of all holineſs, will ſtrengthen you by his Spirit to follow his ſteps; and if, in this world, you walk as "he walked," you ſhall hereafter ſee him in his glory, and reign with him for ever.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 3.

Jeſus dwelt in obſcurity till his thirtieth year, when he entered on his miniſtry—prepared for it, I. *by his baptiſm,* II. *by his faſting,* III. *by his temptation, in which he was urged,* 1. *to diſtruſt,* 2. *to preſumption,* 3. *to ambition.*

WHILE every trifling anecdote of the celebrated characters of antiquity is eagerly explored, little enquiry is made concerning the greateſt character, ever exhibited in the world. We might ſuppoſe, that curioſity itſelf would prompt men to ſtudy the hiſtory of Jeſus; though that be not a proper diſpoſition of mind for the contemplation of ſuch a ſubject, nor would our vain curioſity be ſatisfied. The holy ſcriptures are not adapted to gratify our ſubtle ſpeculations, or to anſwer the various queſtions, which we might be inclined to propoſe.

We might wiſh to know many of the private circumſtances and juvenile tranſactions of the Saviour, concerning which we have little or no information. Nothing is told us of that very large proportion of his life which elapſed between his twelfth and his thirtieth

year;

year; except, in general, that he was ſubject to his parents, that, as his ſtature advanced, he increaſed in grace and wiſdom, and gave early ſigns of uncommon excellence. Yet during all that period he was hid in obſcurity, and removed from the notice of the world: for he dwelt at Nazareth, a town ſo mean and ſo peculiarly infamous, that the queſtion was aſked in a proverbial manner, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth *?" There he paſſed for the ſon of a carpenter, and probably laboured at the ſame low trade with Joſeph his reputed father; for he himſelf was called "the carpenter †."

Joſeph and Mary, together with ſome others, could not but remember the ſignal teſtimonies, which had been delivered concerning him; and, from a view of his whole ſpirit and deportment, they muſt have formed the higheſt expectations. But ſtill he was not generally known or regarded: no public diſplay of his glory had been made, and even many of his relations were diſpoſed to revile him ‡.

What amazing condeſcenſion is this! He ſubmitted for a long ſeaſon to a ſtate of poverty, contempt, and labour. He appeared to be of little benefit to the world, till near thirty years of his life were expired, till but three or four remained for the performance of the errand, on which he was ſent. Shall any of us, then, complain, that we are placed in a low condition, and appointed to a hard and ſervile employment amongſt thoſe who de-

* John i. 46. † Mark vi. 3. ‡ John vii. 5.

ſpiſe

ſpiſe and deride us; and therefore, that our ſphere of uſefulneſs is very contracted? While we behold Jeſus in "the form of a ſervant," let us be ſatisfied with our lot; rather, let us be aſhamed of harbouring a murmuring thought.

The example of our Lord is a leſſon to thoſe, who are aſpiring to a public ſtation in the Church, and preparing for the work of the miniſtry, not to puſh themſelves forward to that holy function, or conclude that their whole life is loſt, becauſe they are not called forth to it ſo ſoon as they might wiſh. They may be in danger of being hurried away by an impetuous and intemperate zeal, though actuated, in the main, by the pureſt motives both towards God and man. The advice to ſuch perſons is, Wait till the proper ſeaſon; attend to, and faithfully diſcharge, your preſent duty; and, while you aim at a more enlarged ſphere of action, ſeek for all ſuitable qualifications, and reſign yourſelves to the divine diſpoſal.

Jeſus began his miniſtry, as it is probable that John the Baptiſt did, at the uſual age, when the Jewiſh prieſts entered on their office. That time being arrived, he did not, through indolence or cowardice, decline the taſk aſſigned him, but ſet himſelf with vigour to execute his work: "Lo," ſaid he, "I come to do thy will, O God *." May we alſo learn with readineſs to obey our Father's call; that no ſelfiſh regards may keep us back from the ſervice appointed us!

* Heb x. 7.

Before

Before we contemplate our Lord in his public character, we ſhall conſider his preparations for it in three remarkable circumſtances, his baptiſm, faſting, and temptation; the importance of which is very properly intimated to us, in that prayer of our church, "By thy baptiſm, faſting, and temptation, Good Lord, deliver us *!"

I. His baptiſm. It may ſurpriſe us, that the holy Jeſus ſhould ſubmit to this ordinance, which he could not uſe as a ſacrament of repentance, or as "the laver of regeneration;" (and it may be urged as an argument, that even thoſe may be admitted to the rite, in whom the whole intention of it cannot be anſwered.) But he thereby deſigned to dedicate himſelf moſt ſolemnly to the ſervice of God; to put an honour upon the miniſtration of John; and to leave his diſciples an example of that obedience, which he meant to require to his own future inſtitution. By the teſtimonies, alſo, which he was then to receive from the Baptiſt himſelf, and immediately afterwards from God the Father by an audible voice from heaven, he has furniſhed us with an unqueſtionable evidence of the truth and importance of his miſſion.

According to the common Era, A. D. 27.

Amongſt the great multitudes, who reſorted to John, Jeſus himſelf came from Nazareth to the banks of the river Jordan to be baptized of him †. The Baptiſt would gladly have declined the office, from a ſenſe of his own extreme

* Litany.

† Matt. iii. 13—17. Mark i. 9—11. Luke iii. 21—23.

 unworthineſs,

unworthineſs, and of the exalted character and dignity of Jeſus. "I have need," ſaid he, "to be baptized of thee; and comeſt thou to me?" But our Lord overruled the objection, obſerving, that being made ſubject to the law, as the Mediator between God and man, he muſt be conformed to every divine appointment: "Suffer it to be ſo now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteouſneſs. Then he ſuffered him."

Are we not alſo under indiſpenſable obligations to ſubmit to every ordinance of God? And are we paying that regard which is due to all the inſtitutions of our holy religion? Ah! what neglect and contempt of the moſt expreſs and ſolemn injunctions! What a ſpirit of profaneneſs, and licentiouſneſs of manners prevail! How different the generality of profeſſing Chriſtians from him, whoſe name they bear! He, though Lord of all, learned obedience as a ſervant: and if he thought it incumbent upon himſelf, "to fulfil all righteouſneſs," what exemption ſhall we plead?

You allow, perhaps, the adminiſtration of baptiſm, if not that of John (which is not contended for), yet that of Chriſt, which is deſigned to be a ſtanding ordinance in the Church, to the end of time. But do you conſider, that you have need to be baptized, not with the mere element of water only, but with the Holy Ghoſt; with "the waſhing of regeneration," that "ſprinkling of clean water," by which God "will cleanſe you from all your filthineſs?" We enter not here into the controverſy, which has been ſo warmly maintained on both ſides, as to prove an unprofitable and hurtful diſputation, concerning the proper mode

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and ſubjects of Chriſtian baptiſm. But we addreſs you, as having been, by this ſolemnity, devoted to the ſervice of Chriſt: and we call upon you to remember the obligations, which it has laid you under. By this ſacrament you are joined to the armies of the faithful, and are bound "to fight manfully under the banner of Chriſt againſt ſin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Chriſt's faithful ſoldier and ſervant unto your life's end *." The vows of the Lord, then, are upon you. And have you not perfidiouſly violated theſe engagements? You ſhould be reminded, that the external rite of baptiſm, though ever ſo ſcripturally adminiſtered, will avail you nothing, if you are not "waſhed from your filthineſs," and have not now "the anſwer of a good conſcience towards God †."

We behold a peculiar honour put upon Jeſus, at the concluſion of the ordinance. The ſolemnity was cloſed, but he remained in prayer; and immediately, while he looked up, the heavens were opened over his head, and the Spirit viſibly deſcended upon him, reſembling a dove, perhaps in ſhape, as well as in its hovering motion. This was like an inauguration of the Saviour, when he was about to enter on his public work, and an intimation, that, as "the anointed of God," he received the moſt extraordinary influences of the Holy Ghoſt. Nor was this all: he obtained a ſtill more glorious teſtimony, for "Lo! a voice from heaven, ſaying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed."

* Office of Baptiſm. † 1 Pet. iii. 21.

This was a memorable tranfaction indeed; whether we confider it as defigned for the encouragement of our Lord himfelf, then undertaking his arduous office, or for the conviction of others, that they might be difpofed to regard him as the true Meffiah, to reverence him as "the only begotten of the Father," and to rejoice in his mediation, as perfectly according with the divine will. The three perfons of the Godhead were here exhibited, and their entire agreement in the plan of falvation was publicly declared. The Son appeared in human flefh; the Spirit refted like a dove upon him; and the Father, though he affumed not any bodily fhape, fpake with an audible voice, proclaiming his concurrence with the Redeemer, and approbation of his work of love.

If we, alfo, be folicitous to obtain for ourfelves a teftimony of the favour of Heaven, let us learn from our Lord to expect it in anfwer to fervent prayer. And we may be the more emboldened to prefent our fupplications in the name of Jefus, fince, as we have feen, he is confecrated to and accepted in his mediatorial office. The refidue of the Spirit is with him: for "he has received gifts for men." We may rejoice and triumph, that the Father is well pleafed in him, as our Surety and our Advocate. But are we likewife, as we ought to be, well pleafed with him? Are we not backward even to credit his declarations, though confirmed by fuch a fulnefs of evidence, and unwilling to acquiefce in his gracious purpofes for our falvation? Why do we not feel the moft ardent affection towards him,

him, and ſay, " This is my beloved, and this is my friend *?" Can we conſider the work of mercy, which he came to perform, the rich benefits, which he beſtows, the excellency and perfection of his perſon and character; and then ſay, " There is no beauty, that we ſhould deſire him †?" This contemptuous diſregard and rejection of him would betray an extreme baſeneſs of diſpoſition, which muſt be utterly inexcuſable.

We follow Jeſus from the banks of Jordan into the wilderneſs, and there behold him ſubmitting, for a ſeaſon, to a ſtate of ſevere mortification, as a further preparation for his future ſervice. Hence we contemplate

II. His faſting. Before he went forth to the exerciſe of his public miniſtry, and with a view, probably, to improve in his private devotions the late ſolemnity of his baptiſm, he retired from ſociety. " He was in the wilderneſs ‡," a deſert part of Judea, full of high and rugged mountains, the very appearances of which were diſmal, and calculated to impreſs the mind with terror. In this gloomy retreat " he was with the wild beaſts," expoſed, as it ſhould ſeem, to their furious aſſaults; but, like the lions in Daniel's den, they were reſtrained from violence, and obliged to acknowledge the power and preſence of their Lord and Maker. Here he continued, in a total forbearance of food for the ſpace of forty days and forty nights together, that

* Cant. v. 16. † Iſa. liii. 2.
‡ Mat. iv. 1—11. Mark i. 12, 13. Luke iv. 1—13.

his whole attention might be given to meditation and prayer.

Moſes and Elijah, two eminent types of him, had done the ſame before. But we contend not for an exact imitation of their conduct. It is not aſſerted, that the ſame ſort of retirement, the ſame degree or length of abſtinence are neceſſary, or even poſſible, for us. As our circumſtances and ſtrength would not permit, ſo neither does our duty require us, to be ſecluded from ſociety for ſo large a portion of time. But we have frequent and urgent occaſion, and might find opportunities of leiſure, for religious privacy. This appears particularly needful at our entrance upon any important undertaking, that by a more expreſs and earneſt application to Heaven, we may obtain ſuch ſupplies of grace as will fit us for our work; and alſo, after the enjoyment of ſtrong conſolations in our ſouls, that we may be preſerved from ſpiritual pride. In general, it is obſervable, where retirement for the purpoſes of devotion is neglected, that public ordinances retain but little efficacy, and that divine comforts, if beſtowed at all, are ſoon loſt, or attended with a haughtineſs of mind. Muſt we not aſcribe it to this cauſe, that many, who profeſs a love for the Goſpel, ſeem to receive no benefit from its miniſtrations, but walk in much darkneſs and diſtreſs; and that others are cenſorious and overbearing, as being elated with a fond conceit of their high attainments? Alas! we fear, that the ſecret duties of religion are almoſt totally diſregarded in this trifling and diſſipated age, when the moſt part carefully avoid

avoid solitude, and know not how to employ themselves alone.

But what have we to do with fasting? It is allowed, there have been those, as in the church of Rome, who enforced and practised it with the utmost degree of superstition. But we, of the present day, are in danger, not so much from superstition, as from licentiousness. It is granted also, that it were presumptuous in us to attempt a total abstinence for forty days. But shall we therefore say, that it is in no case incumbent upon us to fast at all? The ancient saints thought it expedient and necessary; since upon most of their solemn occasions they joined fasting and prayer together. Undoubtedly, persons of different constitutions cannot be confined within the same precise limits, in the forbearance of food. A regard should be had to circumstances, and the great purposes of devotion constantly kept in view. We should humble ourselves before God, and acknowledge that we have forfeited our daily bread. This may tend to "mortify our members, which are upon the earth *," and to subdue in us the evil affections of pride, anger, covetousness, and lust; and, while every indulgence is denied to the body, the immortal spirit may be much less oppressed, and drawn up the more to high and heavenly things. These ends could not be answered in our Lord; but we must be strangely ignorant of ourselves, not to allow, that in these respects we have abundant cause for humiliation and self-denial. Yet why do we talk of fasting, since

* Col. iii. 5.

moſt men plead for, and demand, the full gratification of all their ſenſual appetites? The very mention of mortification is laughed at, as the weakneſs of enthuſiaſm and the madneſs of ſuperſtition; while profaneneſs, intemperance, and riot, almoſt every where prevail and triumph. Few, therefore, can ſincerely join with us in the collect of our church, and ſay, "O Lord, who for our ſake didſt faſt forty days and forty nights, give us grace to uſe ſuch abſtinence, that our fleſh being ſubdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteouſneſs and true holineſs, to thy honour and glory *!"

Our Lord underwent a far more ſevere trial in the wilderneſs, as a neceſſary preparation for his mediatorial office. This will appear in conſidering

III. His temptation. It may juſtly fill us with amazement, to behold the Son of God aſſaulted, vexed, and haraſſed by the prince of darkneſs. But this very circumſtance exhibits his power and grace. He came to vanquiſh the Devil; and, as there can be no victory without a conflict, he entered the liſts with his adverſary, and gave him every advantage for the attack, on purpoſe that he might utterly confound him, and thereby encourage all his own faithful followers to expect the ſame conqueſt, which their Lord and Maſter has obtained.

The onſet was made upon Jeſus ſoon after his baptiſm, and the effuſion of the Spirit upon him. And in general, we ſhall feel the effects of Satan's malice,

* Firſt Sunday in Lent.

after our attendance on religious ordinances, in which we are favoured with divine consolations. "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation *." It occurred also, just before he entered on his public work. The Devil directs his envenomed darts in an especial manner against those, who are going forth to subvert and destroy his kingdom. Yet even these persons stand in need of temptation, and will derive from it peculiar benefits. They will improve, by that painful discipline, in humility and tenderness of spirit, and learn to administer proper counsel and encouragement to those, who are brought into similar circumstances of distress.

We may also remark the place in which our Lord endured the conflict: it was "the wilderness." No situation, indeed, will secure us from the assaults of our malicious adversary. In vain should we fly to deserts or to cells; we should be still exposed. Even though we be devoutly employed in meditation and prayer, as we have intimated, we are liable to an attack. Nay, retirement itself, in some views, may give an additional force to temptation. Perhaps the wilderness was therefore chosen for this singular engagement, in which the Fiend was allowed to exert his utmost rage; the very horrors of the scene favoured his vile purpose, "Jesus was led up of the Spirit," by the peculiar impulse of the Holy Ghost, with which he was then filled, "to be tempted of the Devil." Confident of his own superior strength, he dreaded not the combat: nor we have any real cause to fear, when called out to

* Ecclus. ii. 1.

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the ſame warfare, if we depend on his mighty arm for protection and ſupport. But let us beware of preſumption. Remembering our own weakneſs and the power of our enemy, let us pray continually, " Lead us not into temptation."

What could be Satan's expectation in making ſo extraordinary an attack? Perhaps from the conqueſt he had obtained over the firſt Adam, he might derive a hope, that the ſecond Adam alſo would be baffled and overcome. He determined, at leaſt, to make the deſperate trial. His envious and malicious rage would not ſuffer him to ſubmit, without attempting an oppoſition, and he reſolved to vex, if he could not deſtroy, his antagoniſt. Such likewiſe is his conduct toward all thoſe, who fight againſt him under the banner of the croſs. Their ſtate is ſafe; and probably he may know it; but for the preſent they ſhall all feel the effects of his malevolence.

We ſhall remark the artfulneſs and ſubtilty of this ſpiritual adverſary. It ſhould ſeem that he has ſome way of learning our inward tempers and diſpoſitions, as well as external circumſtances, ſince he generally propoſes that object or plan of action, which appears moſt deſirable and convenient to us. How great, then, is the neceſſity of circumſpection and prayer! Three temptations were offered to our Lord; exactly adapted to his ſituation; and they afford a ſpecimen of Satan's ordinary devices.

1. Jeſus was urged to diſtruſt the divine care. After his long abſtinence, he felt the importunate demands of hunger, and yet poſſeſſed no natural means of ſup-

port. Then came this apoſtate ſpirit (concealing his real character), perhaps in human form, or as an Angel of light, and ſuggeſted to him, that he had within himſelf the power of immediately ſupplying his wants. "If thou be the Son of God," ſaid he, "command that theſe ſtones be made bread." We ſee the cunning addreſs of Satan. His aim was, to induce the Saviour to call in queſtion his high dignity, and peculiar relation to God, or elſe by a miraculous agency to relieve himſelf, as if he were forſaken of his Father. He takes a ſimilar method now. He tempts the diſciples of Jeſus to doubt, whether they be the children of God, intimating that their trials and diſtreſſes are an unfavourable mark; and not unfrequently puts them upon uſing imprudent and forbidden means of procuring deliverance, through a diſbelief of the divine faithfulneſs and love. Let us beware of ſuch an attack, and learn what reſiſtance we ſhould make.

It would have been eaſy for our Lord to accompliſh what Satan propoſed; but he would not even ſeem to diſtruſt the care of Providence; and he has left us an example of a firm reliance upon God in the ſevereſt difficulties. He replied therefore from the ſcriptures, "Man ſhall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God *." Thus he has taught us, to be more anxious to obtain the divine bleſſing, than a ſupply of food, which of itſelf can adminſter no nutriment to the body. We ſhould not dare to purſue any unlawful courſe, or take one ſtep

* Deut. viii. 3.

out of the road of duty, for the providing even of neceſſary ſupport. Let us preſerve our dependence upon the God of heaven, who in a thouſand ways can give us bread to eat, or even ſuſtain us without it.

2. Jeſus was then tempted to preſumption. "The Devil taketh him up into the holy city" (in what way we do not enquire, nor is it neceſſary to know), "and ſetteth him on a pinnacle of the temple." Here again the addreſs was moſt artful: he urged him to preſume upon his relation to God, in the belief of which he could not be ſhaken, to make an improper diſplay of it, and to expect protection without a ſufficient warrant. "If thou be the Son of God," ſaid he, "caſt thyſelf down from hence; for it is written, He ſhall give his Angels charge concerning thee to keep thee; and in their hands they ſhall bear thee up, leſt at any time thou daſh thy foot againſt a ſtone *." Satan, we obſerve, can appeal to ſcripture, to ſerve his own purpoſes; and his conduct has taught us to be upon our guard againſt a wrong application of detached paſſages of the inſpired writings: for texts are frequently quoted in ſupport of the moſt erroneous ſentiments and immoral practices.

In this inſtance we behold the admirable wiſdom of our Lord, wreſting the ſcripture out of the hands of his adverſary, and confounding him with it. He replied, "It is written again, Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God †." We are forbidden, then, to preſcribe unto God what evidence he ſhall afford us, or to

* Pſal. xci. 11. † Deut. vi. 16.

preſume

presume upon his care over us in that line of conduct, which he has not authorised. Yet to this very sin the followers of Christ are generally urged. Indeed, they are in danger from the two opposite extremes. For, if Satan be baffled in one point, he will try another; and therefore it will be an advantage to be apprized of his devices. What, though you be the children of God, and can maintain your hope in him: consider well, where you venture to set your foot. He is not bound by any promise to comply with your vain wishes, or to preserve you, where your proper duty does not call you. Dare not, then, however you may be solicited, to deviate from the right path for the display of your own consequence and abilities; nor fondly imagine, that in such a deviation you can be influenced by any true regard to the glory of God.

3. An attempt was made to seduce the Saviour by such an offer as a proud and ambitious mind would greedily have catched at. "The Devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, in a moment of time." We do not well understand how he conducted this stratagem: but, being permitted to try all his artifices, he had some method of representing the most delightful prospect of earthly pomp and grandeur, that could be exhibited or conceived. Pretending, therefore, to have the absolute disposal of every thing in his own hands, he promised to deliver up to Jesus, all the power and all the magnificence of empire, on condition of receiving an act of adoration.

How

How daring the ſcheme! how deteſtable the falſhood, which ſupported it!

The deſign of Satan is the ſame in all his aſſaults; but he does not always avow or diſcover it. "Fall down and worſhip me," is in effect the meaning of every temptation. And, ah! how frequently does he ſucceed! He ſtill continues to offer "the luſt of the eyes and the pride of life;" and theſe are the baits, which thouſands ſeize with eagerneſs to their eternal ruin. "All this," ſays he, "will I give thee;" and thus he perſuades men to barter away their conſciences, and to forſake God and his truth, from the proſpect of worldly advantages. But we would remind you, while you liſten to ſuch ſolicitations, that you will probably be diſappointed. He, to whom you hearken, is a deceiver and a liar. It is not in his power to beſtow what he promiſes, and what you deſire to obtain. Beſides, if your largeſt wiſhes could be gratified, your poſſeſſions would ſtill be poor and contemptible. "What ſhall it profit a man, if he ſhall gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul *?"

At length the holy reſentment of Jeſus was rouſed; and, giving the tempter to underſtand that his real character was known, he rejected the propoſal with abhorrence: "Get thee behind me, Satan; for it is written, Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only thou ſhalt ſerve †." We learn, then, how to repel the attacks of our enemy. We muſt poſſeſs the ut-

* Mark viii. 36. † Deut. vi. 13.

moſt

most firmness of opposition, and despise every offer of temporal advantage, which might induce us to depart from our God. We must determine to yield no reverence or obedience to any but Him; and then we shall be proof against all the enticements of the world.

The conflict was ended, and the victory obtained. Satan departed, yet only "for a season," intending on some other occasion to renew the assault: and immediately a company of holy Angels came to minister to the relief of Jesus, and to rejoice with him on his glorious triumph.

How replete with instruction is this history! It affords a striking representation of the power, the malice, and the subtilty of our adversary, and the nature of that warfare, to which we are called. You, who follow Christ, must expect to be conformed to him in his temptations. An opposition of the very same nature will be made against you. Do not stagger in your minds, when you come into the conflict; nor decline the combat, though most severe, but arm yourselves for it. "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you *," as he did from Jesus. For this purpose, besides the other parts of the Christian's armour, "take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God †." Your Saviour has left you a noble example. Study, how you may use this weapon to the best advantage; that, like him, you may be able

* James iv. 7. † Eph. vi. 17.

to

to anſwer and repel every ſuggeſtion with, "It is written."

But here, alſo, are exhibited the grace and tenderneſs of our Redeemer. How aſtoniſhing the humiliation, to which he ſubmitted! Painful to himſelf, yet moſt ſalutary in its conſequences to us! Now we are aſſured, that "he is able to ſuccour you who are tempted *," that he is "touched with a feeling of your infirmities †;" and that he "will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape ‡." Yes, in due time you ſhall triumph over all the malice of your enemies. The victory of Jeſus was an earneſt of victory to his people. "The God of peace ſhall bruiſe Satan under your feet ſhortly §." Angels are anxiouſly obſerving your conduct. In the view of ſuch witneſſes, "ſtand faſt in the faith, quit you like men, be ſtrong ‖," and ſoon they will congratulate you, on having obtained a glorious and everlaſting conqueſt.

But are not many unacquainted with this ſpiritual warfare? If you make no reſiſtance, but willingly comply with the ſolicitations of Satan, you may eſcape ſome of the difficulties which the Chriſtian ſoldier meets with. All may ſeem to be peace with you: but the reaſon is, the prince of darkneſs holds his palace in your hearts, and while you allow him

* Heb. ii. 18. † Heb. iv. 15. ‡ 1 Cor x. 13.
§ Rom. xvi. 20. ‖ 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

him the poſſeſſion, he will not diſturb you. But you are no other than his vaſſals, "led captive by him at his will." We entreat you to ariſe, and aſſert your liberty: for to what tremendous conſequences will a continuance in your preſent bondage lead? Cry mightily to God, that he would reſcue you from it, "deliver you from the power of darkneſs, and tranſlate you into the kingdom of his dear Son *."

* Col. i. 13.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 4.

Jesus attended on John's ministry—called certain disciples—went to a marriage-feast at Cana, where he turned water into wine—celebrated the passover at Jerusalem—purged the temple—did not trust himself with some professed converts.

IT may be difficult to assign to the various incidents in the history of Jesus their proper time and place; nor is it of any consequence to our plan. We shall touch upon the principal of them, and nearly according to the order, wherein they occurred, as far as that can be ascertained. But we attend not to any critical enquiries, for settling the chronology. Let us be most anxious, while we are studying the character of the Saviour, that we may know him, as "the way, the truth, and the life," and that he may "be formed in us, the hope of glory."

We have beheld him, at his baptism, publicly anointed and set apart for his great work, on which, after his temptation in the wilderness, he prepared to enter. He did not, however, open his ministry, at once,

once, or difplay his glory by a fudden blaze, but in a gradual manner, as men could bear it.

His familiar companions were few, and thofe few of no confiderable rank in life, taken from common, and not the moft creditable, occupations, fifhermen, tax-gatherers, &c. In the calling and uniting of thefe to himfelf he difcovered his power and his grace, and exhibited a fpecimen of his general conduct through the fucceeding ages of the church. Notwithftanding all the wonders he performed, and that fulnefs of evidence, by which he proved his miffion and divinity, he would have been univerfally defpifed and rejected, had not an Almighty influence been exerted, by which the hearts of fome were inclined to receive and follow him *. He might have commanded the fervices of more than twelve legions of Angels; and therefore his condefcenfion was the more remarkable, in felecting a few obfcure perfons for his intimate affociates and principal agents.

After his temptation, it fhould feem that he took up his abode for fome time, near the place where John was baptizing, probably with the view of attending upon his miniftry; for it is evident that he appeared among his audience one day after another. Thus he became more publicly known, while John attefted the miracle, which had been wrought at his baptifm, and repeatedly directed the regard of his hearers to him, declaring his high character and office, as the propitiatory facrifice for the fins of a guilty world †.

* Newton's Ecclef. Review, p. 60. † John i. 28, &c.

This occurred before Jeſus had begun to preach, or had attached ſo much as a ſingle follower to himſelf. Such a teſtimony, however, ſoon drew the attention of two of John's diſciples to ſo extraordinary a perſon. The one was Andrew the brother of Peter, the other, it is probable, was the Evangeliſt, who relates the fact, and who frequently forbears to mention his own name. In the ſame manner, many have been induced to ſeek the acquaintance of the Saviour, through the report of others, eſpecially through the information of thoſe, who have truly beheld his glory. Nor do any ſeek in vain. He obſerves the firſt motions of their hearts, when they ſincerely turn to him, and affords them the moſt gracious encouragement. He will even prevent their enquiries, by revealing himſelf to them; as he did in the caſe before us. He marked the attention of the diſciples, who were watching his ſteps, with great condeſcenſion invited them to accompany him home, and admitted them to a free and delightful intercourſe with himſelf.

And who, that have obtained the knowledge of Jeſus, will not burn with a deſire to recommend him to the notice and eſteem of their friends? Have we not a brother or a ſiſter, whom, through a plain and faithful teſtimony of our experience, we may introduce to the Saviour? Thus it was, by the declarations and influence of Andrew, that Peter was brought to him, and immediately taken into his ſervice, under a new and ſignificant name. Every viſitant met with a kind reception from him; nor will any, who ſincerely apply, be at this time rejected.

But all his diſciples do not come to him in the ſame way. Some, we have obſerved, owe their knowledge of him, and their firſt good impreſſions, to their connections in life; while others are called, not through any previous acquaintance with religious perſons, but by an immediate, and, as it were, viſible exertion of divine grace. He is "found of them, who ſought him not *." He ſpeaks ſuddenly, not to their ears only, but to their hearts, prevents their objections, overrules their purpoſes and deſires, and makes them "willing in the day of his power †," to alter their courſe, and follow a new maſter. Thus, upon his removal to Galilee, he no ſooner met with Philip, than he ſaid unto him, "Follow me;" and the man was induced from that hour to forſake his former occupation, and become the attendant of Jeſus.

What joy and pious exultation will a diſcovery of the Saviour excite in the true believer! No wonder that he feels the warmeſt affections of gratitude, love, and zeal, and haſtens to ſpread the influence around him. Philip, unable to contain the rapturous delight, now produced in his ſoul, and wiſhing others to be as happy as himſelf, took the firſt opportunity of telling his friend Nathanael, that he had found the promiſed Meſſiah.

Here a different character is preſented to us. Nathanael, probably, as a ſincere worſhipper of God, like many others, "waited for the conſolation of Iſrael;" but, though an upright man, and under the

* Iſa. lxv. 1. † Pſal. cx. 3.

beſt impreſſions, he was ſtill ſhackled by the influence of popular prejudice. He could not admit, that any good thing, much leſs ſo illuſtrious a perſon as the Saviour of the world, could ariſe from the infamous town of Nazareth. He was induced, however, by the mild expoſtulation and advice of Philip, to examine and judge for himſelf. On this occaſion we admire the compaſſion and tenderneſs of Jeſus to the weakneſs and folly of thoſe, who truly deſire to know him. So far from upbraiding Nathanael with his ignorant and raſh concluſions, he expreſſed the warmeſt approbation of his integrity, and propoſed him to the notice of others, "Behold an Iſraelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" This honeſt enquirer could not but be aſtoniſhed by ſuch a declaration from one, whom he had conſidered as an entire ſtranger; and, being referred to a particular place of retirement, where probably he had been engaged in devout meditation and prayer, and where Jeſus aſſured him that his eye was upon him, a powerful conviction broke in upon his mind. At once he ſaw his whole heart expoſed to view, he felt his doubts and ſcruples to be removed, and acknowledged the preſence and glory of the divine Saviour: "Rabbi," ſaid he, "thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Iſrael." This undiſguiſed and bold profeſſion of his faith obtained a gracious acceptance. Jeſus replied, "Thou ſhalt ſee greater things than theſe," adding, that from that hour he ſhould behold ſuch a train of miracles, as if heaven itſelf were opened in atteſtation of his miſſion. Thus likewiſe, in all caſes, the ſincere convert ſhall be favoured with increaſing light, and ſtrength,

ſtrength, and comfort: "for unto every one that hath ſhall be given, and he ſhall have abundance *."

We perceive through the whole of this hiſtory, that the grace of God operates in a ſovereign manner. Here were two of a family, three of a city, called to the knowledge and the love of Chriſt, while the greater part, perhaps, of their friends and neighbours, remained ſtrangers and enemies to him. Even ſo it is now. He is confeſſed, loved, and glorified by a few perſons in a town, and frequently by ſuch as were previouſly connected together by kindred or acquaintance. Theſe, too, are ſo oppoſite to the reſt in ſentiments, principles, and practice, that "they are men wondered at †." If any ſhould be diſpoſed to aſk a reaſon for this, we have nothing to anſwer, but cry out in devout admiration, "Even ſo, Father; for ſo it ſeemed good in thy ſight ‡." Hence alſo we obſerve a variety in the caſes of his people: and therefore we ſhould not be forward to condemn any one, merely becauſe his religious experience, in ſome uneſſential parts, differs from that of another. Let us not arrogantly preſcribe unto God, but bow before him, and acknowledge, that "the Judge of all the earth will ſurely do right." Inſtead of cenſuring the "diverſities of his operations," let us adore the riches of his mercy. If the moſt diſobedient and rebellious be willing to ſubmit unto Jeſus, he will graciouſly receive them. Their miſapprehenſions, fears, and unbelief, may for a time prevent their recourſe to him; but no ſooner do they diſcover a real

* Mat. xxv. 29. † Zech. iii. 8. ‡ Mat. xi. 26.

desire to become his disciples, than he meets them with expressions of his kindness, admits them to a familiar communication with himself, and "fills them with joy and peace in believing."

Let us, then, make the application to ourselves, and ask, Are we "the called of Jesus Christ?" It is of little consequence, comparatively, by what particular means we have been affected; but are we indeed brought to the knowledge and love of his name? Do we possess that warmth of affection, that ardent zeal for him, which these young converts shewed? Do we, like them, bear witness, "We have found the Messiah?" And are we disposed to "follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth?"

Soon after our Lord's arrival in Galilee, he and the few disciples, whom he had now attached to himself, were invited to a marriage; probably the marriage of a relation, since his mother and some other of his kindred were there *. He was not inattentive to the calls of social life, nor wanting in any offices of respect and kindness to those, with whom he was nearly connected. He condescended, therefore, to be present upon that occasion, and to partake of the entertainment. Our church has inferred from this circumstance, that "he adorned and beautified the holy estate of matrimony." Doubtless, he testified his approbation: nor do his professed followers shew any real sanctity, or promote his cause among men, by despising that institution, which is declared to be "honourable in all †." The religion

* John ii. 1, &c. † Heb. xiii. 4.

of

of Jeſus does not require that moroſeneſs and entire ſeparation from ſociety, into which ſome weak, but pious, perſons have been led, through the fear of conforming to the world. They have made Chriſtianity appear with a gloomy and forbidding aſpect, by repreſenting the moſt temperate convivial meetings as altogether profane, and on this ground refuſing to mix with them. Our Lord's example teaches us, not indeed that we may at any time give into rioting and exceſs, or indulge a light and diſſipated ſpirit, but that it may be right and expedient on certain occaſions to uſe a greater freedom of converſation and intercourſe with our friends, than our general habits or wiſhes may allow.

There was one circumſtance, which added a peculiar luſtre to this marriage, as it proved the means of diſplaying the miraculous power, and confirming the character, of Jeſus. Probably, there was no affluence in the family, and, on account of this extraordinary gueſt, there might be a larger company than had been expected; ſo that there was not a ſufficiency of wine. The mother of Jeſus repreſented to him the defect, hoping, and perhaps intimating, that he might ſupply it by his own divine agency. She met with a rebuke, indeed, for ſeeming to direct him in any ſupernatural operation, ſince, where the Godhead was to be exerted, he owed her no obedience, and could not be ſubjected to her control *. Yet, while he declared that the proper

* The anſwer of Jeſus to his mother, "WOMAN, what have I to do with thee?" to an Engliſh reader may convey the idea of harſhneſs

per feafon for his interference was not arrived, it is plain from her injunctions to the fervants, that he gave her caufe to believe, her propofal would foon be complied with.

Accordingly, at the time which he thought moft fuitable, he proceeded to work the very miracle fhe had wifhed for, and fuddenly converted a large quantity of water into wine of the moft exquifite tafte and quality. This aftonifhing effect was produced without the intervention of any vifible means; merely by his own fovereign will, and before many witneffes. Such alfo was the fuperior excellency of the new wine, that it immediately excited the notice and admiration of the company.

Our Lord's conduct on this occafion has been fhamefully mifreprefented, as if he had exerted his divine power to promote the purpofes of intemperance. I know not by what profane ridicule fome perfons have afperfed the character of Jefus, as though he had been in reality, what his enemies of old infidioufly defcribed him, "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber *." They triumph in this little narrative, fuppofing it to prove, what they could wifh, that there is nothing criminal in fenfual entertainments, protracted even to excefs.

harfhnefs and difrefpect. That it was meant as fome kind of check or reprehenfion, is allowed; but the appellation of "woman" implied no want of proper regard; fince in thofe times, and in the Greek language, the fame addrefs was ufually made by fervants to their miftrefs, and even by fubjects to a Queen.

* Luke vii. 34.

What will not human depravity pervert? It can turn that into poifon, which was defigned for falutary food. Accordingly, there are thofe, who have attempted to juftify the moft flagitious actions from the facred writings. It almoft moves one's indignation, that fo infamous a reproach fhould be caft upon the holy Jefus. Is it, then, conceived poffible, that he fhould not only remain in the company of drunkards, but work a miracle for the fake of lengthening out their merriment? What more blafphemous affertion could Satan himfelf advance? We have no reafon to conclude, but that every thing in this meeting was conducted with the utmoft decency and temperance, and that our Lord improved the opportunity for the fpiritual inftruction and edification of the guefts. In his converfation on the moft private occafions, can any inftance be adduced, which can vindicate or encourage, we need not fay a licentioufnefs of manners, but even a trifling gaiety of mind? The "lovers of pleafures" will gain no advantage by appealing to his conduct, but only betray their own deformity upon a comparifon of themfelves with his perfect excellence.

The mifreprefentation feems to have arifen from that addrefs to the bridegroom; "Every man at the beginning, doth fet forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worfe; but thou haft kept the good wine until now." This, however, defcribes merely what was ufual at entertainments, and has not any neceffary reference to that particular occafion; or, admitting that it had, it would not prove,

prove, that any of the company then aſſembled were in a ſtate of intoxication. The word itſelf, rendered WELL DRUNK, does not always mean exceſs; as it is applied by the beſt authors to caſes, wherein temperance was obſerved.

This miracle, like all the reſt, which Jeſus wrought, was, probably, deſigned to promote the moſt benevolent and uſeful purpoſes. That large increaſe of wine was a recompenſe to the maſter of the houſe for his kindneſs and hoſpitality, and might be conſidered as a token, that they, who receive Jeſus and his diſciples, ſhall not loſe their reward. It was evidently calculated to diſplay his high character in a more illuſtrious manner, than had been done before; for he then "manifeſted forth his glory, and his diſciples believed on him;" their faith was confirmed, and they were the more encouraged to forſake all and to follow him, when they ſaw ſuch ſtriking proofs of his power.

We do not forget, that he furniſhes a better entertainment, and invites us to feaſt with him at his table, while he beſtows ſpiritual bleſſings with a liberal hand. He ſays, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine, which I have mingled *." The knowledge of his love will afford an inconceivably greater delight to the ſoul, than the moſt exquiſitely rich wine to a refined taſte. In general, too, he reſerves "the good wine" till the laſt: he communicates much happineſs to his people from the firſt, but the end will be moſt glorious indeed. With reſpect, therefore, both to his

* Prov. ix. 5.

providence

providence and his grace, we rejoice in his all-ſufficient proviſion and ſupport.

Soon afterwards he went up to Jeruſalem to celebrate the paſſover, a feſtival of peculiar importance among the Jews, at which the attendance of all their males was required. This particular obſervance does not obtain with us; but are not we under indiſpenſable obligations to wait upon God in the public means, which he hath appointed? Let us learn from Jeſus, then, to pay an exact and punctual regard to all the ſacred ordinances.

Immediately upon his arrival at Jeruſalem, he repaired to the temple, where a remarkable tranſaction occurred. Among other profanations of that holy place, the outward court was groſsly violated, probably through the covetouſneſs of the prieſts; for an open market was held in it, to the diſturbance of devout worſhippers. The ſervice of God might be urged in excuſe, as the people were here accommodated with their reſpective offerings. But Jeſus felt a pious indignation at the ſhameful abuſe, and ſet himſelf to reform it. "When he had made a ſcourge of ſmall cords, he drove out of the temple" the profane traders, "and the ſheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and ſaid unto them that ſold doves, Take theſe things hence; make not my Father's houſe an houſe of merchandiſe." Such an interference of a perſon, who poſſeſſed no human authority, was ſingular indeed! It amounted to no leſs than a full declaration of his prophetical character, and of his peculiar relation to God. In this view it

will

will appear proper and consistent, like many of those significant actions of the old prophets, by which as the messengers of Heaven they instructed and admonished the people *.

So uncommon an exertion could not but excite the public notice. His disciples beheld it with surprise, yet saw in it the completion of an ancient scripture, which they considered as descriptive of that very spirit, by which he was then actuated: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up †." Regardless of his own safety, he was concerned only for the glory of God in the due administration of his service. Must we not perceive and admire the power, as well as the zeal, of our Lord in this extraordinary occurrence? For whence was it, that those, who were occupied in merchandise, submitted without opposition to one, of such low rank and estimation in life? They seem to have felt, not merely a consciousness of guilt, but a secret and awful dread of their reprover: and this effect we are disposed to ascribe to a supernatural impression upon their minds. By the very same influence, the persons, who afterwards came to apprehend him, notwithstanding their malice and their fierceness, were struck to the ground before him.

Some, however, among the Jews called him to account for this proceeding, and demanded a proof of his divine commission. The very action, which he

* Jer. xiii. xix. xxvii. Ezek. iv. xii. Zech. xi. See Bishop Hurd's ingenious discourse on Christ's driving the merchants out of the temple.

† Psal. lxix. 9.

had

had performed, might have been accepted as evidence; but probably they wished to find fault, rather than know the truth. Instead therefore of giving them any direct answer, he replied, as he usually did to cavillers, in a parabolical manner. "Destroy this temple," said he, "and in three days I will raise it up." This they understood not; but afterwards, in a perverted sense, they made it the ground of a charge against him *. It was meant as a prophecy of his own resurrection, that infallible proof of his divine character, and in that view was recollected by the disciples, to the increase and confirmation of their faith. Thus it frequently happens, that the very same scriptures, and the very same doctrines, which are an offence and a stumbling block to some, are to others the source of joy and consolation. Let us look well, in all our researches, to our motives and dispositions, and receive the word of God "in an honest and good heart."

While WE profess to be satisfied, that Jesus should purge the temple at Jerusalem from profane attendants, let us ask, Are we such worshippers, as he will approve? Is there no violation of the house of God among ourselves; no irreverence, which requires reformation? Is that holy place never turned into "a house of merchandise?" Are our minds never employed there in settling temporal accounts, and in various schemes of trade, as if we were in the midst of a market? What, then, would Jesus say, if he were to appear amongst us? And let us remember, that

* Mark xiv. 58.

" all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him, with whom we have to do *." We ſhould endeavour, therefore, to leave the cares of the world at a diſtance, " that we may attend upon the Lord without diſtraction †." " Take theſe things hence," for they are moſt unſuitable to his ſacred courts.

Jeſus, we have ſeen, publicly aſſerted his high character at Jeruſalem, and in the midſt of many adverſaries. He ſpake with an efficacy, which ſilenced at leaſt, if it did not convince, his oppoſers: but did any truly receive him? Many were ſo ſtruck with his miracles, (which yet are not recorded) that they acknowledged him to be the Meſſiah, and profeſſed to believe in his name. But they were ſuch, as our Lord perceived were not to be depended on. There was in them ſomething unſound, or ſhamefully defective. Either they were falſe-hearted, with declarations of faith, love, and zeal, waiting only for an opportunity to betray him to his enemies; or elſe, if ſincere, they poſſeſſed not a proper firmneſs and courage, and dared not to ſtand forth in defence of his cauſe. Even a friend, who is afraid or aſhamed to eſpouſe your intereſts, is not entitled to your confidence. You will not think yourſelves ſafe in his hands; and therefore, from a proper regard to your own welfare and ſecurity, you will be backward to truſt him. Such prudence is indiſpenſably neceſſary, in religious as well as temporal concerns. A little experience will teach you not implicitly to rely on every profeſſor. You ought not, in-

* Heb. iv. 13. † 1 Cor. vii. 35.

deed,

deed, to ſuſpect hypocriſy in all, becauſe you may have found it in ſome: a jealous temper is inconſiſtent with Chriſtian love. But a cautious reſerve and circumſpection towards many of thoſe, who diſcover an attachment to the Goſpel, are highly expedient to protect you from various ſnares. This you will learn from Jeſus, when "he did not commit himſelf unto them," who are ſaid to have "believed in his name."

We muſt not overlook the reaſon aſſigned for his conduct: "he knew all men, and needed not that any ſhould teſtify of man; for he knew what was in man." But is it not the excluſive prerogative of Almighty God, to "ſearch the heart and try the reins?" Yet this is aſſerted of Jeſus: he perceived all the ſecret purpoſes and hidden motives of thoſe, who would have joined themſelves to him, and at once detected the baſe hypocriſy, which lurked within their boſoms. Let us ſtand in awe, and fear for ourſelves. Known unto him are our various ſtates, principles, and deſires. Let each one aſk himſelf, Of what ſort is my profeſſion of love to Jeſus? What was it which firſt induced me to declare myſelf his diſciple? Am I unfeignedly devoted to him; and may his cauſe be ſafely committed to me?

There is no creature "that is not manifeſt in his ſight." If there be a Judas, a mere pretender to ſanctity, "a ravening wolf in ſheep's clothing," let him tremble at the thought, that the eye of Jeſus penetrates through all his diſguiſes. Or, if you want courage publicly to avow your real ſentiments of regard for the Goſpel, ſo that you might eaſily be tempted to betray

it; is not this a meanneſs and inconſiſtency, of which you ought to be aſhamed before him?

The general caſe is; many among ourſelves are called Chriſtians, and ſay that they believe the ſcriptures, becauſe by the favour of Providence they were born and educated in a Chriſtian land, and they are content to take up with the religion of their fathers and their country. Is not this the ſole reaſon, why ſome are not Pagans or Mahometans? But is this the faith, which Jeſus will approve? No: he will not be impoſed upon by our ſaying, Lord, Lord, in an empty form of words, with which our hearts do not agree. We pray, therefore, not only to "have a name that we live," but to poſſeſs "the faith of the operation of God," whereby, being vitally united to Chriſt, and abiding in him, we ſhall produce the fruits of righteouſneſs, to the glory and praiſe of God. Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 5.

Jesus, consulted by Nicodemus, declared to him the nature and necessity of regeneration—the operation of the Holy Spirit—the appointed method of deliverance from condemnation—and the different states and characters of those to whom the gospel is sent.

WE have not yet seen any promising appearances of success, upon the first opening of our Lord's ministry at Jerusalem. His strenuous exertions in purging the temple could not but excite a commotion through the city; and, though his claims were not generally regarded, many were, at least, convinced of his divine mission by the miracles which he wrought. Very few of higher station gave any serious attention to him; as that contemptuous question implied, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him *?" But we are here introduced to one of that very rank, who sought after Jesus, with an earnest desire to be acquainted with his doctrine.

Nicodemus, a person of consequence, as a magistrate, and a member of the great council, the Sanhe-

* John vii. 48.

drim, probably, too, a man of learning, and as a Pharifee exact in all religious obfervances, paid him a vifit: but it is remarked, that "he came by night *." He might be afraid or afhamed to have it known, aware that a free and open intercourfe with Jefus would bring upon him reproach and oppofition; and therefore to conceal it from public notice, and preferve his reputation, he took advantage of the privacy, which is afforded by the darknefs of evening. But allowing, that he was under a very improper influence of the fear of man, he was not thereby prevented from applying to this divine Inftructor for information in the truth. Our Lord, who never rejected or difcouraged a fincere enquirer, overlooking or not upbraiding his weaknefs, received him with kindnefs, and with freedom declared the moft important myfteries of the kingdom of heaven. He conftantly fpoke with a regard to the circumftances and difpofitions of his audience, and opened the Gofpel, more or lefs, as they could bear it. Here was no fcornful, captious difputant, but an humble, teachable fcholar, feeking direction in the way of righteoufnefs. And here we fhall find, within a few verfes, a more clear and explicit reprefentation of the great fyftem of Chriftianity, than in any other paffage, of equal compafs, throughout the four Evangelifts. It is recorded for our benefit, and every particle of it concerns each of us as much as it did Nicodemus himfelf. May we, like him, be willing to fit at the feet of Jefus, and hear his words, "which are able to make us wife unto falvation!"

* John iii. 1, &c.

How

How gracious and condescending was our Redeemer, in giving his time and his company for the instruction of an individual! The salvation of one soul is inconceivably more important than all the momentous affairs of mightiest empires, which employ the councils and armies of princes. The minister of Christ, therefore, who like his Master is attending to the spiritual welfare even of a single person, has a more honourable post, and a better object in view, than the statesman or the hero, on whom the eyes of thousands are fixed.

The main subjects of the conference with Nicodemus may be reduced to four:

I. The nature and necessity of regeneration. This being the first thing which our Lord insisted on, we conclude that the doctrine lies at the very foundation of Christianity. "We know," said Nicodemus, "that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Such an address, acknowledging that Jesus was a prophet divinely commissioned, implied a desire of receiving instruction from him. Without any preface or apology, the Saviour began to explain the religion which he came to set up, and with peculiar solemnity declared an entire renovation of mind to be universally and indispensably requisite: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." As if he had said, "Dost thou believe I am come from God? Then I, the faithful witness, assert this great truth. Dost thou enquire after the kingdom of God? Be assured, that none can

be a member of it, who is not ſo totally transformed in his inward diſpoſitions, as to become a new creature."

The Jews, and eſpecially the Phariſees, boaſted of the privileges of their birth, as the deſcendants of Abraham, and depended on their ſcrupulous attention to external rites and ceremonies. They ſuppoſed, too, that, whenever Meſſiah ſhould appear to eſtabliſh his government, they ſhould have, more than a preference, an excluſive right, to its advantages. In oppoſition to this groſs deluſion, our Lord maintained, that their extraction from the moſt excellent progenitors, their religious education and profeſſion, and all their outward obſervances, would not ſecure to them the bleſſings of his ſalvation; but that all of every character, rank, and nation (the ſelf-righteous Phariſee, no leſs than the idolatrous Gentile), muſt receive ſuch a thorough change of heart, as may properly be deſcribed by being born "again."

We are aware, that much pains are taken, not to deny our Lord's aſſertion, for that is expreſs, but by ſubtilty and refinement to explain away its meaning. "To be born again," it is ſaid, is only a ſtrong eaſtern metaphor, which implies a renunciation of former errors, whether Jewiſh or Pagan, and a profeſſion of Chriſtianity. Let us try this interpretation by other paſſages. "Whatſoever is born of God overcometh the world *." And can ſuch a conqueſt be aſcribed to every one, who is called a Chriſtian? We have continual and lamentable proof to the contrary.

* 1 John v. 4.

Equally

Equally abſurd is the notion, that baptiſm conſtitutes regeneration. This, indeed, is the external ſymbol; the water, which is applied to the body, fitly repreſenting the operation of the Spirit in cleanſing and purifying the ſoul. There is a peculiar propriety in offering up ſolemn prayers, at the adminiſtration of that ſacrament, that the inward and ſpiritual grace may accompany the outward and viſible ſign; and thanks may be given to God for thoſe promiſes, which encourage us to expect the bleſſing. But "whoſoever is born of God ſinneth not *:" and is this to be affirmed of every baptized perſon? Whatever we may charitably hope concerning infants, the public and habitual profaneneſs of many adults is a deciſive proof to the contrary.

It is ſaid, then, that "to be born again" is to reform the life, and pay an exact regard to the duties of morality. This, we grant, is highly expedient and neceſſary, and is an effect which will flow from regeneration, but it may, in ſome meaſure, be produced without it. For do not many "make the outſide clean, whoſe inward part is full of wickedneſs †?" But the change, of which we ſpeak, originates within, and is properly a renovation of the heart, in which corrupt and carnal affections are ſubdued, holy, ſpiritual deſires and tempers are implanted. It is, therefore, "a new creation," ſo that the man is, as it were, made over again, not as to his body, which ſuffers no alteration, but as to the diſpoſitions of the mind: his depraved nature is rectified. The language is metaphorical, we allow; and

* John v. 18. † Luke xi. 39.

who ever denied it? But ſome meaning was intended to be conveyed in the figure; and certain modern explanations have ſubtilized it into nothing. If Jeſus deſigned only to inculcate an external reformation of conduct, and regularity of morals, he uſed expreſſions too ſtrong, or, at beſt, very dark and intricate, which perplex rather than inſtruct. On this interpretation the metaphor is abſurd, and all the ſolemnity of our Lord's addreſs mere trifling; for he has rendered that obſcure which in plain words would have been eaſily underſtood. Had this been the ſenſe, Nicodemus would not have wondered; nor would Jeſus have ſpoken of it as a myſterious doctrine.

But if we give the metaphor its full force, there is a beautiful conſiſtency and grandeur in the paſſage. The Jewiſh ruler was perplexed, and betrayed his ignorance of ſpiritual things by the fooliſh queſtions he propoſed. Many acute and learned men have likewiſe diſcovered great abſurdity, by their objections to the truth here advanced; and even among ſuch the renovation of the ſoul has been made a ſubject of profane ſcorn and ridicule. Jeſus, however, replied only by repeating his former aſſertion, and declaring the neceſſity of receiving from the Holy Spirit a more excellent principle, than we can derive from our parents by the natural birth. "That which is born of the fleſh is fleſh; and that which is born of the Spirit is ſpirit." Every thing produces its like: and if it be an allowed maxim, that "none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean *,"

* Job xiv. 4.

the

the offspring of fallen man muſt univerſally partake of his depravity. But the Holy Ghoſt communicates to the ſoul a new and divine nature, which reſembles that bleſſed Agent in purity and goodneſs.

None, therefore, ſhould put off the ſubject to others, as if it were requiſite only for groſs and abandoned ſinners to be born again. Would you ſay, Why ſhould I be diſturbed about the matter, ſince my conduct is regular, my dealings fair, and my tempers amiable? You forget ſurely, that we all ſpring from the ſame corrupt original. The neceſſity of regeneration ariſes not from the peculiar circumſtances, in which ſome men may be placed, or the degree of guilt they may have contracted, but from the degeneracy of human nature itſelf, which we all without exception equally partake of, though different perſons may diſcover it in different ways. Probably, you cannot explain the mode, in which the effects of the fall are tranſmitted to us, for the ſubject does not accord with "philoſophy and vain deceit," yet our Lord expreſsly declares, that, upon our firſt entrance into the world, we bring with us a carnal principle, which is oppoſite to God; and ſurely the univerſal condition of the human race is enough to prove, that there is not one, who does not feel a ſtrong propenſity to evil. This being granted, it follows at once, "We muſt be born again."

Without ſuch a renewal of the mind, we ſhall remain in a ſtate of alienation from God, and therefore can have no part in the Meſſiah's kingdom of grace. That being a kingdom of righteouſneſs, thoſe only, who are changed into the divine likeneſs, can reliſh its holy

and ſpiritual precepts. Neither can we enter into the kingdom of glory, ſo long as we continue under the influence of "the fleſh," which is "enmity againſt God." We are thereby unfitted for maintaining communion with him: he cannot admit us into his preſence with ſuch a diſpoſition; nor can heaven itſelf afford any enjoyment of happineſs.

Of how great importance is it, then, to enquire, Am I born again? Are my tempers and affections ſanctified? Let us not be ſatisfied with an external decency of behaviour, and an honourable conduct among men; for, though highly beneficial to ſociety, they do not neceſſarily imply a right ſtate of the heart towards God. Yet let not the doctrine be abuſed, as if it militated againſt the intereſts of morality. The change will be manifeſted by an uniform ſeries of virtuous actions. As birth from the womb is the beginning of animal life, ſo that, which we ſpeak of, we maintain to be the commencement of a life, new, holy, and ſpiritual. It will be diſcerned by its fruits; we do not, we cannot flatter thoſe, whoſe converſation is unprofitable, vain, and ungodly, that they ever were "partakers of the divine nature."

Is it aſked, In what way, or by what particular means, is this renovation effected? To anſwer the enquiry, and to guard againſt miſtakes, we conſider

II. The operation of the Spirit in producing the change. Many are not properly aware of their own inability, and therefore with great earneſtneſs, and ſtrong reſolutions of amendment, themſelves undertake

take the work, for which they are utterly unfit. The consequence can be no other than repeated and painful disappointments. Their plans fail; their purposes are broken; temptations prevail against them; so that they "labour in the very fire." Confusion and despair must ensue, unless they are willing to be indebted to the God of all grace, and cry to him for help. Then he will arise for their deliverance, and make his own strength perfect in their weakness.

No stream can be more excellent than its original source; for all the waters will take their tincture from the fountain, whence they spring. From man's depraved nature nothing truly good can be derived. He is under an incapacity, from his disposition as a fallen creature, to recover himself. Indeed the metaphor of the new birth implies, that we cannot effect it any more than bring ourselves into existence. The work is the work of God: and accordingly, he who is "born again" is said to be "born of God," and "of the Spirit *;" and the change is represented by such things, as must of necessity be ascribed to the exertion of an Almighty power. It is a new creation; "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works †." It is a resurrection from the dead; nor can we possibly restore to ourselves the life we have lost. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ ‡."

* John i. 13. iii. 5. 1 John v. 1.
† Eph. ii. 10. ‡ ii. 4, 5.

This

This doctrine, we grant, may be perverted to a bad and dangerous purpose: but the abuse does not detract from its truth or excellence. Let us improve it to our own advantage, and learn to be more deeply humbled before God, and not to depend on our most vigorous resolutions; but, while we form plans of amendment, to pray with importunity, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me *." We should be encouraged to "work out our own salvation, with fear and trembling," when we know, that "it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure †." "He shall deliver the needy, when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper ‡." By an invisible, but effectual influence, he suggests serious thoughts, excites good desires, produces holy principles, and raises our carnal affections to high and heavenly things. Who will deny, that the God of spirits can have such an access to our minds?

We attend not to metaphysical subtilties and refinements, nor attempt to explain the mode, in which the Holy Ghost performs his operations. But, not dreading the charge of enthusiasm, we maintain, that, without his powerful interposition and continual assistance, we cannot be Christians indeed. The subject is mysterious: there is a secret in it, which God hath thought proper to conceal; which, therefore, it is not needful, or perhaps possible, for us to know. Is this urged as an objection? Recollect, that the doctrine was repre-

* Psal. li. 10. † Phil. ii. 12, 13. ‡ Psal. lxxii. 12.

sented

ſented to Nicodemus in this very light: our Lord taught him to expect the ſame difficulties in grace, which occur in creation. "Marvel not, that I ſaid unto thee, Ye muſt be born again. The wind bloweth, where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Thus the Spirit acts upon the human mind, in a ſovereign and unſearchable manner: we cannot direct or control his influence, and, though we clearly diſcern his effects, it would baffle all our underſtandings to trace and explain the methods and reaſons of his operations. The ſubject may appear to be involved in ſo many and great difficulties, that our faith may ſtagger, and we may cry out with Nicodemus, "How can theſe things be?" But if we ſincerely deſire inſtruction, he, who condeſcended to the ignorance and prejudices of that "maſter of Iſrael," will have compaſſion on our weakneſs, and "guide us into all truth."

Such is the pride of man, he is not content to "know in part;" and hence frequently the vain pretender to right reaſon rejects the grand doctrines of revelation, when he finds in them unfathomable depths. But let us remember "the certainty of thoſe things wherein we have been inſtructed," and on whoſe authority we have received them. "Verily, verily," ſays our divine Teacher, "We ſpeak that we do know, and teſtify that we have ſeen; and ye receive not our witneſs." There are matters ſtill farther removed from our comprehenſion: and if already we are diſpoſed to object, "how ſhall we believe, if he tell us of heavenly things?" Yet how ſhall we controvert his teſtimony?

mony? "No man hath aſcended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven." He declared himſelf, then, to be in heaven, at the very moment he was converſing with Nicodemus upon earth. And if we admit this account, why not admit, what is not more unintelligible, the influence of the Spirit in regenerating, and ſanctifying the ſoul?

Jeſus having aſſerted his own authority as a divine and infallible witneſs of the things of God, proceeded to inform the Jewiſh ruler of the important benefits reſulting from his miſſion: and hence we learn

III. The deliverance of ſinners from condemnation through his gracious interpoſition. This doctrine ſhould be conſidered in connection with that already eſtabliſhed; for it is a part of the ſame glorious plan; and the one is as intereſting to us as the other. The foundation of both is laid in man's fallen condition: for, if that could be diſproved, the whole ſyſtem would be ſhaken, and fall to the ground together. We are aware, that it is an offenſive truth, but we are compelled by the ſtrongeſt conviction to maintain, that "we were by nature the children of wrath *;" and it is clearly implied in our Lord's addreſs to Nicodemus. For while he opened the grand ſcheme of divine mercy, he evidently argued upon the ſuppoſition, that we are in a ſtate of ruin, obnoxious to juſtice. Thus, when he aſſerted, "that whoſoever believeth in him, ſhould not periſh, but have eternal life;" did he not plainly intimate,

* Eph. ii. 3.

that all, conſidered only in themſelves, without the remedy propoſed, are liable to periſh for ever? From the very grace, offered through the Saviour, we infer, that the whole human ſpecies, without excepting a ſingle inſtance, ſtand in need of redemption, and that there is ſuch depravity in their nature, as without reſtraint would infallibly lead them to final deſtruction. "God ſent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be ſaved." Now, where would have been the peculiar mercy, of forbearing to execute the ſentence of wrath, if we had not deſerved it? or, of preventing the miſery, into which we are not likely to fall? Let us enter deeply into this important truth, without which the Goſpel will be no more to us than an entertaining ſtory: it may furniſh amuſement, but will not promote our ſalvation. Are we affected, as we ought to be, with a conviction of our guilt and danger? What plea can we offer in arreſt of judgment? Let us thankfully accept the propoſal of deliverance, and urge with our offended God the mediation of his own Son.

The diſpenſation of grace is here fully opened to Nicodemus. God is repreſented as looking down in compaſſion on our ruined race, and, through the incarnation of Jeſus Chriſt, effecting redemption. He interpoſed not through any view of merit in us, or the expectation of receiving a recompenſe; but we are taught to aſcribe our reſcue to his own ſovereign, free, and abundant mercy. "God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Well may we exclaim with the Apoſtle, in devout admiration, "Herein

is

is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be the propitiation for our ſins *."

Jeſus, then, according to the divine counſel, laid aſide his glory, and aſſumed "the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh," that he might make reconciliation. He came down from heaven, not armed with vengeance for our deſtruction, but inviting ſinners of every deſcription to return unto God, with aſſurances of a full remiſſion. Yet forgiveneſs is beſtowed, not merely by an act of indemnity, but in conſideration of an adequate ſatisfaction. The righteous character of God is preſerved and diſplayed, while his juſtice demands a ſacrifice, and the Saviour undertakes to anſwer that demand. "Without ſhedding of blood is no remiſſion †;" but "it is not poſſible, that the blood of bulls and goats ſhould take away ſins ‡;" and therefore Jeſus appeared for the very purpoſe of ſubmitting to the death of the croſs, that he might thereby "obtain eternal redemption for us." Thus he declared to Nicodemus, with reference to the peculiar nature of his ſufferings, "As Moſes lifted up the ſerpent in the wilderneſs, even ſo muſt the Son of man be lifted up." His death, then, was not, as ſome vainly talk, an accidental matter; for he himſelf predicted and ſpake of it as the appointed means of procuring our pardon and ſalvation. It was the end of his incarnation, and the object he kept in view, during the whole of his abode on earth.

We rejoice, that he hath made a full atonement by his blood, and therefore we can encourage every

* 1 John iv. 10. † Heb. ix. 22. ‡ x. 4.

trembling

trembling penitent to "look unto him and be ſaved;" becauſe he is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſin of the world*." If the Lord God ſhould deal with you according to the ſtrictneſs of his righteous law, your condemnation would be juſt and unavoidable. But the Goſpel proclaims mercy to all, without exception, who feel and deplore their own wretchedneſs. Refuſe not the gracious tender, for "whoſoever believeth—ſhall not periſh, but have everlaſting life." To ſuppoſe, that your application to Jeſus will not ſucceed, is to caſt a foul reproach upon him, as if he meant not what he ſaid, or could not make good his own aſſurances. Give an unreſerved credit to his word, and plead his name in a confident expectation of obtaining reconciliation with your God.

Let us not trifle in a buſineſs of unſpeakable importance, but remember that life and death are ſet before us. Let us therefore impartially examine ourſelves, while we conſider

IV. The different ſtates and characters of thoſe who receive, and of thoſe who reject, the Saviour. Our Lord inſiſted on this ſubject in very ſolemn terms, at the cloſe of the conference, probably that he might leave an awful impreſſion upon the mind of Nicodemus, and that from him the other members of the Sanhedrim might be warned of their danger, if they ſhould continue in unbelief. The miniſters of Chriſt, in like manner, ſhould admoniſh their hearers, and draw the ſame line of diſtinction between them.

* Iſa. xlv. 22. John i. 29.

Such as fix their entire regard on Jesus, and derive all their expectations of pardon and salvation from him, while they "abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes," are immediately received into the divine favour, however numerous or aggravated their iniquities have been. The sentence of the law, to which they would otherwise have been exposed, has now lost all its force: the Lord himself looks on them with delight, and will preserve them to his heavenly kingdom. "He that believeth on him is not condemned." How gracious the declaration! What a firm foundation for our hopes! What a continual source of comfort! Christians, should it not draw forth your warmest gratitude and love, and excite you to holy diligence and zeal? Why should you now be terrified or distressed by any occurrence? Depending on the assurance of your Redeemer, with devout admiration say, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me *."

How different the case of unbelievers! Possibly, they may assume certain specious appearances of virtue, and pretend a high regard to morality; yet, not being impressed with any deep conviction of sin, they have no true value for the Saviour, and refuse him the submission he requires. On that ground, they will perish eternally. Since faith in the Son of God is the only appointed means of deliverance from condemnation, all who are destitute of this principle, whatever else they may plead, remain under the sentence of death. In-

* Isa. xii. 1.

deed,

deed, without any confideration of their contempt and rejection of the Gofpel, as tranfgreffors of the divine law they have incurred the threatened penalty: and who fhall acquit them? Jefus Chrift "was manifefted to take away our fins;" but they can receive no benefit from that grace, which they defpife. Nay, this very circumftance aggravates their guilt, and not only enfures their punifhment, but will increafe their mifery for ever. "He that believeth not is condemned already, becaufe he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Unbelief, therefore, is an offence peculiarly heinous and more deftructive than any other, as it effectually bars the door of mercy.

Various objections are urged againft this reprefentation. It is faid, that, while faith is infifted on, as the only point of diftinction, the grand criterion by which the ftates of men will be finally determined, we derogate from the holinefs and juftice of God, as if he paid no regard to their moral characters. We reply, that none poffefs any moral excellence in themfelves, previous to their acceptance with God, on the terms of the Gofpel. But the grace of God produces a difference; and fuch a difference, as proves that he acts agreeably to his own perfections, both when he faves, and when he condemns. This is the defcription here given by our Lord himfelf.

Sinners will be judged for their contemptuous neglect of means afforded them; and it will be found, that the real caufe of their rejection of the Saviour is a rooted averfion to that purity of heart and conduct,

 which

tion, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved." We have here, then, an account, which cannot be controverted, why ſo many diſregard the gracious offers of ſalvation. It is a deformed and odious picture of all unbelievers, and is drawn by him, who cannot err. They are obſtinately attached to wicked habits; and therefore they will not hear or honeſtly examine the doctrine, which would detect their depravity. They may probably aſſign ſome other reaſon, profeſs themſelves ready to liſten to argument, and complain of the want of evidence. But the true cauſe of their infidelity is their own inſincerity. On this ground the ſentence of condemnation will proceed againſt them; and the equity of it will be univerſally allowed.

The faithful Chriſtian exhibits an exact contraſt. He is not only juſtified by grace, but renewed in the ſpirit of his mind. A total change of conduct, therefore, has taken place with him; nor is this an hypocritical pretence to ſanctity; he is inwardly, what he appears outwardly. He is not afraid of detection, nor will he ſhrink from the moſt ſearching examination. "He that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifeſt, that they are wrought in God." His holy practice, then, will be a public teſtimony of his ſincerity, and an undeniable proof, that the Lord God, through the whole plan of ſalvation, maintains a conſtant regard to his own righteous character.

to the view and admiration of men and Angels, and will obtain the approbation and reward of his God and Judge.

A ſure teſt is here afforded us for the trial of ourſelves. What reception do we give the Goſpel? Do we "come to the light," and deſire to be minutely ſearched by it? If not, how ſhall we defend or account for our contempt? Have we ſuch reaſons to aſſign, as we dare allege before the tribunal of Heaven? Or rather, would not our very excuſes, if properly weighed, betray our hypocriſy and hatred of all goodneſs, ſo as to overwhelm us with confuſion? While, therefore, the word of ſalvation is ſent unto us, let us "take heed, leſt there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God *."

* Heb. iii. 12.

which his Goſpel requires. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved." We have here, then, an account, which cannot be controverted, why ſo many diſregard the gracious offers of ſalvation. It is a deformed and odious picture of all unbelievers, and is drawn by him, who cannot err. They are obſtinately attached to wicked habits; and therefore they will not hear or honeſtly examine the doctrine, which would detect their depravity. They may probably aſſign ſome other reaſon, profeſs themſelves ready to liſten to argument, and complain of the want of evidence. But the true cauſe of their infidelity is their own inſincerity. On this ground the ſentence of condemnation will proceed againſt them; and the equity of it will be univerſally allowed.

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The believer will prefer no claim of merit, but his works which are performed in faith, will be exhibited to the view and admiration of men and Angels, and will obtain the approbation and reward of his God and Judge.

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* Heb. iii. 12.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 6.

Jesus, retiring from Jerusalem to Galilee, passed through Samaria—conversed with a woman of Sychar—replied to his disciples, who brought him food—abode two days with the Samaritans, and had many converts—went to Cana, and cured the son of a nobleman at Capernaum.

"JESUS hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps *." It will, therefore, be necessary for us to contemplate this illustrious pattern with serious attention, that according to our measure we may copy after it. "He, that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked †." Among other particulars, which are proposed for our imitation, his unwearied diligence and zeal, in accomplishing the grand object of his mission, were very remarkable. His ministry, though contracted within narrow limits, was most laborious. For the last three years and a half, which is supposed to include the whole of his public life, he travelled much, and preached often; and

* 1 Pet. ii. 21.

† 1 John ii. 6.

that

that too, with great fatigue both of body and mind. If we accompany him from place to place, we ſhall obſerve him conſtantly intent upon his work, foregoing his own eaſe and temporal comfort, and cheerfully meeting extreme ſufferings, that he might be uſeful. In one word, "he went about doing good *."

Have we nothing to learn from this deſcription? Is it not likewiſe incumbent upon us to be active, for the ſhort ſeaſon we may continue here? And ſhould we not deſire, not ſo much to live long, as to fill up our portion of time, whatever it may be, in an honourable and profitable manner? If we have the mind of Chriſt, we ſhall eagerly ſeize every opportunity, wherever we may travel, to glorify God and promote the ſalvation of our fellow creatures: and thoſe we ſhall account good journeys indeed, which have contributed to the converſion of a ſinner. But alas! they, who follow the Saviour moſt cloſely, ſtill remain at a great diſtance from him. Even his faithful ſervants may juſtly be covered with confuſion, when they think how little they poſſeſs of his diligence, ſelf-denial, fortitude, and zeal. How prepoſterous is ſloth and ſenſuality in thoſe who are called by his name!

It is probable that our Lord continued at Jeruſalem, and in the neighbouring parts of Judea, for ſome months after his conference with Nicodemus. But at length, his popularity having rendered him offenſive to the Phariſees, he judged it expedient, to retire from their obſervation. He therefore removed to Galilee

* Acts x. 38.

for his own ſafety, yet keeping in view the great object of his miſſion *. A prudent attention to our own ſecurity, when we are expoſed to the aſſaults or ſtratagems of enemies, is in no reſpect inconſiſtent with religious fidelity and courage. We ſhould not ſhrink from danger, when we meet it in the path of duty; but in every other caſe to hazard our lives is raſhneſs and preſumption.

In paſſing from Jeruſalem to Galilee, he muſt of courſe go through the intermediate country of Samaria, which was then inhabited by a kind of degenerate Jews, mixed with heathens, who had introduced many idolatrous and ſuperſtitious cuſtoms into the profeſſed worſhip of the true God †. Here he deſigned to make known his high character, and leave a bleſſing behind him; for which purpoſe a remarkable occurrence opened the way. The providence of God can ſo order the minuteſt circumſtances, as to render them all ſubſervient to his own gracious plan of bringing ſinners to himſelf.

When he approached to the city Sychar (probably the ſame as Sychem in the old teſtament), being exhauſted with his long journey, he ſent his diſciples into the town to buy food, and himſelf ſat down weary, hungry, and thirſty, by a noted place called "Jacob's well." Thus it appeared, that he was very man, partaker of our weakneſſes, and ſubject to our natural wants and infirmities, ſince he ſtood in need of a cup of water to refreſh him. Juſt at that time a woman of

* John iv. 1, &c.

† Dr. Prid. Connect. Part. 1. Book vi.

Samaria drew near, whoſe neceſſities had led her to the well; and Jeſus ſolicited her aſſiſtance to quench his thirſt. This was not the whole of his intent, but ſerved chiefly as an introduction to his main deſign, of ſaving her precious ſoul, and making her an inſtrument of his glory. How great is his condeſcenſion, how tender his compaſſion, who waits not for the application of ſinners, but meets and prevents them with his goodneſs!

The woman expreſſed her ſurpriſe at his addreſs, ſince ſuch violent prejudices ſubſiſted between the Jews and Samaritans, that they would neither aſk nor receive any favours from each other. Ah! what miſchiefs ſpring from a party ſpirit! How often does it obſtruct all religious and ſocial intercourſe between thoſe, who are connected by the cloſeſt ties! Jeſus, however, paſſing over the diſpute between the two nations, immediately gave a turn to the diſcourſe, that he might lead her to the knowledge of himſelf. He intimated, that he had far better, even living, water to beſtow, and that, if ſhe had underſtood his real character, ſhe would have implored this bleſſing at his hands. Her reply diſcovered entire ignorance of his meaning; but Jeſus, with an aſtoniſhing meekneſs, bearing with her miſapprehenſions, explained and confirmed his former aſſertion. He declared, that the water which he propoſed to communicate was ſo ſuperior to the ſpring before them, that it would effectually and for ever quench the thirſt, and be a ſource of eternal bleſſedneſs to the ſoul. The woman ſtill reſting in groſs and carnal notions, like Nicodemus on another occaſion, conſidered him as ſpeaking only of common water, endued with ſome ſpecial virtues.

Alas!

Alas! how unapt we are to form any ſpiritual conceptions! "Our ſoul cleaveth unto the duſt *;" and it is with extreme difficulty that we admit any other ideas, than thoſe of earthly objects. On this account, they, whoſe office it is to teach and to admoniſh, ſhould be furniſhed with much patience and forbearance, that they may not be offended or diſcouraged, when their words are miſunderſtood. Though one method of inſtruction fails, another ſhould be attempted. It will be peculiarly proper, in order to convey religious truth with good effect, to aim at the conſciences of the audience, and endeavour to fix in them a deep conviction of guilt.

Thus our Lord, perceiving the poor Samaritan's inſenſibility and diſregard of ſpiritual bleſſings, awakened her to a ſenſe of her ſinful and dangerous ſtate, by ſetting before her ſome circumſtances of her iniquitous conduct, which, however it might be concealed from others, was all expoſed to his view. "Go, call thy huſband," ſaid he, "and come hither." She replied, "I have no huſband:" upon which Jeſus obſerved, "Thou haſt well ſaid, I have no huſband; for thou haſt had five huſbands, and he, whom thou now haſt, is not thy huſband: in that ſaidſt thou truly." This ſtriking and unexpected diſcovery of the adulterous commerce, in which ſhe was then living, produced the deſired effect. She was inſtantly convicted, as if all her offences had been placed in array before her †. Yet, probably with a view to ſhift off ſo diſagreeable a

* Pſal. cxix. 25. † John iv. 29.

ſubject as her own wickedneſs, while ſhe acknowledged Jeſus to be a prophet from heaven, ſhe requeſted information of him touching the principal point in debate between the Jews and Samaritans. The latter retained only a part of the Moſaic law, and even that they had greatly corrupted. They had alſo erected a temple on mount Gerizim, in oppoſition to that at Jeruſalem; and each nation contended eagerly for its place, as well as mode, of worſhip.

Our Lord took the opportunity of explaining to the woman the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, then about to be eſtabliſhed, aſſuring her that all diſtinction of places would ſhortly ceaſe, ſo that men might every where have acceſs unto God, and ſerve him with acceptance. He reproved the degeneracy of the Samaritans; and while he aſſerted that the Salvation of God would proceed from the Jewiſh church, he foretold the abolition of their rites and ceremonies, and inſiſted ſtrongly on the neceſſity of pure, fervent, and ſincere devotion. "God is a Spirit: and they, that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth." The ſolemnity of this addreſs could not but affect her mind; and immediately ſhe was led to mention her expectation of Meſſiah, the promiſed Deliverer, and of the reformation which he would introduce. Prepared, no doubt, as our Lord then ſaw her, to receive the declaration, without any further preface, or apprehenſion of danger from the diſcovery, he made himſelf known to her as the exalted Perſonage, whom ſhe looked for: "I, that ſpeak unto thee, am he."

And did he ever finally leave any humble enquirer in ſuſpenſe about his character, as the Saviour of the world? Does he not give all neceſſary information to every one, who earneſtly implores his direction? Yes; let us be encouraged to aſk and wait for his divine teaching: "Then ſhall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord *." Nay, the grace of Jeſus is ſo large and free, as to ſurpaſs all our conceptions. The hiſtory before us exhibits it as preventing grace. So far from diſdaining this poor, ignorant, bigotted, lewd, and wicked woman, he firſt made the overture of mercy; or elſe, it ſhould ſeem, ſhe would not have ſought after him. He is ſtill acting the ſame kind and condeſcending part towards ſinners of the preſent day. He ſends a meſſage of peace and love to you, and ſolicits your attention. Your paſt folly, your heinous iniquities, and inveterate evil habits, will be no objections or difficulties with him. He can inſtruct; He can pardon; He can ſanctify. "Whoremongers and adulterers," ſo continuing, "God will judge †;" but whoremongers and adulterers may be converted by the grace of Jeſus, may become ſincere followers of him, and then they ſhall inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Do we "know the gift of God?" Let us contemplate the excellency and the value of it, till our hearts burn with the moſt ardent deſires, that this gift may be ours. Have we drunk of this "living water?" or do we thirſt for the refreſhing ſtreams? If we retain our

* Hoſ. vi. 3. † Heb. xiii. 4.

fondneſs

fondneſs for the vanities of the world, we are ſtrangers to the "well of life;" for this would have ſatisfied the ſoul; this would have made every other enjoyment, in compariſon, appear poor and contemptible.

Perhaps it may excite our wonder, that a woman of Samaria, and ſuch a woman, ſhould obtain mercy, while many of the learned Doctors and devout Phariſees at Jeruſalem periſhed in unbelief. We adore the myſterious diſpenſation, and acknowledge it to be wiſe and holy. "Even ſo, Father, for ſo it ſeemed good in thy ſight *." Our Lord himſelf declared to many who were highly eſteemed amongſt men, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you †." Let us beware, then, how we deſpiſe any, even of the loweſt character. "There are laſt, which ſhall be firſt ‡." Without reflecting on others, let us give diligence for ourſelves, "to make our calling and election ſure §."

Nor let the great duties of Chriſtianity be forgotten or neglected, in an angry contention for ſome of its outward obſervances. We are called to "worſhip God in ſpirit and in truth." Let us unite, then, in this one grand concern, and lay aſide our diſputes about inferior matters even in religion. If others will maintain warm and furious debates concerning places or modes of worſhip, let us "exerciſe ourſelves unto godlineſs." For, however attentive we may be to forms and ceremonies, ſo long as we do not love as brethren,

* Mat. xi. 26. † Mat. xxi. 31.
‡ Luke xiii. 30. § 2 Pet. i. 10.

and

and ſerve God with inward ardour of devotion, we have not known Jeſus, nor rightly underſtood the deſign of his appearance.

The conference with the woman was probably interrupted by the return of our Lord's diſciples. After purchaſing proviſion in the town, they brought it for the refreſhment of their Maſter. Upon their approach, they were aſtoniſhed to find him in familiar converſation with a woman of Samaria; for they ſtill retained all the bigotry of Jews. Yet, ſuppreſſing their wonder, they came and beſought him to take ſome neceſſary ſuſtenance. He, however, unmindful of his own wearineſs and hunger, and intent only on the grand object of his life, the ſaving of immortal ſouls, diſcovered no inclination to eat, but ſpake of receiving a better entertainment, than what they were acquainted with. His meaning was miſapprehended, as if he referred to nothing more than common food; for even the diſciples were ſlow in their conception of ſpiritual things. To correct their miſtake, he then declared more explicitly, "My meat is to do the will of him that ſent me, and to finiſh his work." Foreſeeing that he ſhould have a multitude of converts among the Samaritans, he rejoiced, and called on them alſo to exult in the proſpect: he encouraged them to labour in the work of the miniſtry, from the expectation of an abundant and glorious harveſt, which would iſſue in eternal life.

If we, like Jeſus, are intent on the duties of our reſpective offices, we may be diſpoſed, perhaps, on certain occaſions, to neglect ourſelves. It is not, indeed,

deed, incumbent on us to refuſe our food, but the cauſe of God ought to be much dearer to us than our own neceſſary refreſhment. Whatever be our vocation, an employment is aſſigned us by the providence of God. To it, therefore, we ſhould attend, not with indifference, as if it were a ſecondary matter, but with the ſame eagerneſs and delight, which we feel in gratifying our ſenſes or miniſtering to the ſupport of our bodies. But do not many live, merely that they may eat and drink; "whoſe God is their belly?" How few enquire, what is the will of God; what is the proper work, which he would have them to finiſh? Even when we know our duty, are we not evidently averſe to, or weary of it? Not ſo the ſenſualiſt, when furniſhed with the object ſuited to his appetite.

Much of our Lord's addreſs to his diſciples is particularly applicable to miniſters, who are "labourers in God's huſbandry," appointed of him to ſow, to reap, and gather in the harveſt. Though their moſt ſtrenuous exertions cannot enſure ſucceſs, ſtill they muſt be diligent and unwearied in cultivating the field, committed to them, ever looking unto him, "who giveth the increaſe." Nay, ſhould no preſent fruit appear, it ought not to be concluded, that all their pains are ineffectual. Others may "enter into their labours," and diſcover the benefit in ſucceeding generations. The final harveſt approaches, when they ſhall receive their reſpective wages, according to their fidelity: and they will exult, not only in their own ſalvation, but in ſeeing thoſe, who, through their miniſtry, were reſcued from ſin and miſery, and conducted to

eternal

eternal glory. Then, what anthems of praiſe, what grateful acclamations will be heard from every mouth, while "he that ſoweth, and he that reapeth, ſhall rejoice together!"

They, who are anxious to ſave immortal ſouls, will be glad to obſerve the eagerneſs of the people, like that of the Samaritans, in flocking after Chriſt; and, when multitudes are crowding to the houſe of God, they cannot help ſaying, Surely, this is like the white appearance of the fields, before the harveſt. May their prayers and expectations be anſwered by a plentiful increaſe in their different places, and by an abundant "ingathering" into the heavenly garner, which may be their crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jeſus!

But to return to the woman of Samaria: the words of Jeſus made a deep impreſſion upon her mind. Such was the height of her tranſport, that ſhe forgot the trifling buſineſs on which ſhe had come to the well, and left her water-pot behind. Filled with wonder and joy, and with an earneſt concern for her friends and neighbours, ſhe ran and proclaimed among the inhabitants of the city, that the Meſſiah was at hand, and invited them to accompany her to him, that they might be convinced for themſelves. How important is the converſion of one ſinner; eſpecially as it may lead to that of many others! You, who are acquainted with Jeſus, will recommend him to the notice and eſteem of every one, with whom you are connected. You will perſuade them to go with you to thoſe ordinances, where he has diſcovered himſelf to you, and be ready to ſay, "Come, and ſee." Perhaps, they may be influenced from your

your report, to hear and examine, and may "obtain like precious faith with you."

Multitudes of the Samaritans, having credited the testimony of the woman, came forth from the city; and anxiously desirous to be confirmed in their dependence on the Saviour, by a personal intercourse with him, they solicited his continuance. Never did he refuse to gratify the wishes of such, as truly sought him, or to improve an opportunity of usefulness. He therefore yielded to their request, and abode two days, preaching among them with acceptance and success. So effectual was his word, that, though he appears not to have wrought any miracles there in attestation of his doctrine, many were convinced of his high character, and professed a sincere subjection to him.

We enquire, then, whether you have discovered the same eagerness, which the Samaritans did, to cultivate an acquaintance with Jesus. By the ministry of his servants in the Gospel, he himself draws near to you: but have you entreated his presence and continuance? We read of those, who besought him to depart out of their coasts: and something of a similar spirit is manifested among ourselves. But if you cordially desire him, he will not merely visit you in a transient manner; he will make his abode with you. Many have borne witness concerning him, and, like the woman, invited you to come and see for yourselves. Have you credited their report? Or on what testimony is your faith built? Does it rest entirely on the accounts of others, without any particular application to yourselves? Or have you so experienced the power and grace of Jesus,

 that

that you can ſay with the Samaritans, "Now we believe, not becauſe of thy ſaying; for we have heard him ourſelves, and know that this is indeed the Chriſt, the Saviour of the world?"

When his deſigns in Samaria were accompliſhed, he proceeded on his journey, but declined, for the preſent, going to Nazareth, where, he was aware, the people entertained ſtrong prejudices againſt him: and in general it is allowed, "that a prophet hath no honour in his own country." He turned aſide, therefore, into another part of Galilee, and came again to Cana, where he had changed the water into wine. Here he met with a favourable reception; for many of the inhabitants had beheld the miracles, which he had done at Jeruſalem. Here alſo he diſplayed his divine character by a freſh exertion of his power, more glorious than the former.

During his ſtay in that town, an application was made to him by a nobleman from Capernaum, which was at a conſiderable diſtance, in behalf of his ſick, and, as he ſuppoſed, his dying ſon. In general, not many rich and honourable perſons of the world reſorted to him: but ſharp troubles will often conſtrain thoſe, who have been moſt averſe from Chriſt, to implore his preſence and aſſiſtance. Here was one of high rank, an attendant, probably, in the profane court of Herod, who, having heard of the fame of Jeſus, haſtened to him, and beſought him, in compaſſion to his diſtreſs, to heal his child. This circumſtance alone proved, that he poſſeſſed a meaſure of faith, though mixed with much unbelief. Perhaps, he had

previouſly

previously declared, that he would not be convinced, except he saw some miracle performed. For our Lord spake to him in language of reproof, which implied such a disposition; " Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."

The nobleman, however, unwilling to take a denial, urged his request with greater importunity: " Sir, come down, ere my child die." He seems to have had low conceptions of the power of Jesus, as if his bodily presence were necessary for performing the cure. But Jesus, while he answered his prayer, gave him an indisputable proof, that his exertions were not limited to place, and that he could heal by a word, even at a distance. He said therefore, " Go thy way, thy son liveth." A declaration so astonishing, we might have supposed, would have staggered his faith; but he was enabled instantly to believe it, and he went home in full expectation of his son's recovery. Nor was he disappointed: the happy news met him on the road; and it appeared, that the child was perfectly restored at the very time, when Jesus had assured him of the favourable event. Thus a beloved life was preserved, and, what was a matter of far greater consequence, many persons obtained the knowledge of salvation. For not only the nobleman, but all his family together, submitted to Jesus, with a firm and unreserved reliance upon him.

And, after such abundant evidence, shall WE fluctuate in our principles? Shall we any longer doubt the power, or the grace of Jesus? Is any case too hard for him? Or will he reject any humble application for mercy? We learn from this example, to recommend

our children to his care. If they are not afflicted with bodily ſickneſs, their ſouls are univerſally diſeaſed. Let us pray, therefore, "Lord, come, and heal my ſon." But let us not forget our own neceſſity; and therefore, while we aſk for our offspring, let us implore a bleſſing for ourſelves. Our faith may, at firſt, be weak, and our notions dark; but if we are encouraged to have recourſe to Jeſus, and earneſtly ſolicit his gracious help, he will extend his compaſſion to us; and we ſhall ſhortly glorify him for his great ſalvation.

While the character of Jeſus is exhibited, and indubitable proofs are brought, of his ability and readineſs "to ſave unto the uttermoſt," is there one among us, who does not need, or deſire, his aſſiſtance? Oh, the fatal blindneſs, and wretched ſtupidity of men! They neglect and deſpiſe the Saviour, to their own everlaſting deſtruction. But you, whom affliction weighs down, or convictions of guilt terrify, behold the merciful Redeemer, and ſay, "Lord Jeſus, to whom elſe can we apply? Thou only canſt relieve us." He is ſtill the ſame, and, though at a diſtance, can inſtantly remove your complaints. His bodily preſence is not neceſſary: He can ſpeak the word, and your health ſhall be reſtored, your peace of mind eſtabliſhed. Only believe his own gracious declarations: Go your way, expecting what he hath promiſed, and, according to your faith, ſo ſhall it be done unto you.

JESUS

SECT. 7.

Jesus preached at Nazareth—miraculously escaped—dwelt at Capernaum—wrought various miracles—rose early—took a circuit round Galilee—called four disciples, after a miraculous draught of fishes.

SUCH an inhabitant as Jesus, the world never saw either before or since. Every view of him, during his abode on earth, not only furnishes instruction, but excites amazement. Each part of his life is a proof of his own assertion, and a striking comment on what he said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work *." While we observe his activity, may we feel the force of his example, as an incentive to diligence! And as we perceive with what strength of evidence his high character and divine mission were displayed, may our faith and hope in him abound more and more!

Wherever he travelled, he appeared as no common person: both the doctrines he delivered, and the miracles he wrought, proved incontestably, that he was more than an ordinary prophet, and no less than the

* John iv. 34.

Saviour of the world, " over all, God bleſſed for ever."

" He returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee *:" being anointed to his office by the Holy Ghoſt, he was, by the ſame unction, directed, aſſiſted, and comforted in its execution. " The power of the Spirit" ſo accompanied his miniſtrations, as to carry a forcible conviction to the minds of others. " There went a fame of him through all the region round about: and he taught in their ſynagogues, being glorified of all." We ſhall not wonder, that he engaged the general attention of the neighbourhood, if we take a view of his conduct, and the circumſtances which occurred, during his firſt circuit round Galilee.

" He came to Nazareth," which had been the place of his education, and principal reſidence till he entered on his pubiic miniſtry. He had declined going thither for ſome time after his viſit at Jeruſalem, and turned aſide to the other parts of Galilee, on account of the prejudices, which his townſmen entertained. He himſelf teſtified, that " a prophet hath no honour in his own country:" thoſe, who have known him in his childhood, or lived with him on terms of intimacy, in a lower ſituation, are ſeldom diſpoſed to pay him reverence or attention, as a teacher of religion. We might have imagined, indeed, that Jeſus would have been an exception to this general obſervation, and that thoſe, who were witneſſes of his aſtoniſhing wiſdom and holi-

* Luke iv. 14, &c.

neſs

neſs, even at an early age, would have been prepared to liſten and ſubmit to his inſtructions. The fact, however, was otherwiſe, as our Lord had foretold; for he was ſufficiently aware of the enmity of the Nazarenes againſt him. But, though he knew what his reception would be, he determined to bear his teſtimony amongſt them, and give them an opportunity of manifeſting their real diſpoſitions. Nor are the miniſters of his Goſpel to be deterred from declaring the truth, though they have to combat with prejudice and averſion. Neceſſity is laid upon them, and they muſt deliver their meſſage, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

Upon his arrival at Nazareth, "he went, as his cuſtom was, into the ſynagogue on the Sabbath day." At Jeruſalem alone, where the temple ſtood, ſacrifices were offered and the Moſaic rites obſerved. But in almoſt every town and village ſynagogues were erected, like our pariſh churches, for public worſhip, for prayer and praiſe, for reading and expounding the ſcriptures. To them our Lord reſorted, whenever he had opportunity; ſo that he may be propoſed as a pattern of a diligent attendance on religious inſtitutions. But do all his profeſſed followers copy after him? Is it their cuſtom, their habitual practice, to frequent the houſe of God? Is there any excuſe to be urged for their neglect of it, which will bear examination? If Jeſus thought it right to be a conſtant worſhipper in Jewiſh aſſemblies, who ſhall deſpiſe or turn away from Chriſtian ordinances? Who ſhall ſay, that he has no need of prayer

and the word of God, ſince Jeſus himſelf paid ſuch regard to them?

One particular perſon preſided over each of theſe places, called "the Ruler," who directed the ſervice, and had a power of appointing any man, ſeriouſly diſpoſed and properly qualified, to officiate in it. Accordingly, upon the appearance of Jeſus in the ſynagogue at Nazareth, he was deſired to read; and what was probably a leſſon for the day, furniſhed him with a ſuitable text for his firſt ſermon among them. The attention of the congregation was fixed upon him, while they heard him repeat thoſe remarkable words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach the Goſpel to the poor: he hath ſent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of ſight to the blind, to ſet at liberty them that are bruiſed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord *." The paſſage confeſſedly deſcribed the office of their expected Meſſiah; and, while they were anxious to know what application he would make of it, he ſolemnly declared that it was fulfilled in himſelf.

The completion of the prophecy affords ſtrong conſolation to us. We are here taught to regard Jeſus, as the anointed of God, ſent from above, and as bringing with him the gracious offers of pardon for the guilty, peace for the miſerable, and ſalvation for thoſe, "who are ready to periſh." In this repreſentation the ſinful, depraved, and helpleſs condition of man is clearly

* Iſa. lxi. 1–3.

implied;

implied; and the bleſſings of redemption are freely propoſed to the acceptance of all, who feel and lament the melancholy truth. If we pride ourſelves on any fancied goodneſs or ability of our own, we groſsly miſtake our caſe, and overlook the grand peculiarities of the Goſpel; nor can we receive thoſe important benefits, which Jeſus came to beſtow. He gives wiſdom to the ignorant, righteouſneſs to the guilty, ſanctification to the unholy, and redemption to the miſerable captive. But he confers no favour on the proud and ſelf-ſufficient, who, not being ſenſible of their own neceſſities, will not ſubmit or apply to him.

We aſk then, Are you "the poor," of whom the prophet ſpeaks; poor, in a ſpiritual ſenſe, as perceiving yourſelves deſtitute of every thing really excellent? The Goſpel proclaims glad tidings in your ears: Jeſus brings a meſſage of mercy to you, and bids you take "the unſearchable riches" of his grace.

Or, are you diſtreſſed in mind, not on account of worldly loſſes, but from a conviction of your guilt and danger? Is your anguiſh extreme, ſo that, under the dread of God's diſpleaſure, you cry out, "Thy rebuke hath broken my heart?" Jeſus is commiſſioned to adminiſter ſuitable and adequate relief. He will "bind up your wounds, pouring in oil and wine," and will continue his kind attentions to you, till the cure be perfected. It is his peculiar office "to heal the broken-hearted."

Do you fear, that the ſentence of condemnation is gone forth againſt you, and that you are detained as "priſoners" in the hands of divine juſtice? Such, in-

deed, is your natural ſtate; nor is there any eſcape poſſible, but by the gracious interpoſition of Jeſus. He grants "deliverance to the captives," cancels the ſentence, and proclaims a full forgiveneſs. Or, do you bewail your ſpiritual bondage, under the oppreſſion of thoſe enemies, to whom you have long been ſubject, and who are too ſtrong for you? On this account alſo, we would direct you to look unto Jeſus, who alone can reſcue you from this miſerable ſervitude. He calls upon you to aſſert your freedom: for "he ſays to the priſoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkneſs, Shew yourſelves *."

You are diſtreſſed, perhaps, by your extreme ignorance in divine things, and lament that all appears darkneſs and confuſion to your minds. It may be, that you had conceived highly of your own diſcernment, but now are free to confeſs, that you are ſpiritually "blind." It is a happy change. While you ſaid, "We ſee," you would have ſpurned at the propoſal of any one, to open your eyes. Now you cannot but welcome the Saviour, who "recovers the ſight;" and exhorts you to "anoint your eyes with eye-ſalve, that you may ſee †."

Yet, after various ſtruggles and painful conflicts, your diſtreſs may probably increaſe, if no ſenſible deliverance be wrought for you; and every attempt to gain your liberty may make your chains the more galling and inſupportable. You are, therefore, fitly deſcribed, as being "bruiſed" with your fetters. But,

* Iſa. xlix. 9. † Rev. iii. 18.

though

though you are heavily oppreſſed, and unable to extricate yourſelves, your caſe is not deſperate. Jeſus appears with a powerful arm, which ſhall be exerted in your behalf. He not only gives you permiſſion to go forth, but he himſelf will "break your bands in ſunder," releaſe you from the tyranny of the world, the fleſh, and the Devil, and "make you free indeed *."

Should the deſponding fear ariſe, "We have ſinned ſo long and ſo preſumptuouſly, that mercy cannot now be extended to us; the time of grace is expired:" this great Prophet of our God will quiet your apprehenſions, while he "preaches the acceptable year of the Lord." In his name we can aſſure you, that, if you return to your offended God, you ſhall all find a favourable reception. He waits to pardon and to bleſs you. This is the happy ſeaſon, prefigured by the ancient jubilee: the proclamation of the Goſpel, like the joyful ſound of the trumpet among the Iſraelites, declares, that your debt is cancelled, the appointed hour of your enlargement is come, and your inheritance ſhall be reſtored. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of ſalvation †."

Such is the purport of that important prophecy, which our Lord applied to himſelf, and on which he inſiſted in his preaching to the Nazarenes. And what was the effect produced? They were ſtruck with wonder: the dignity and grace of the Speaker made a ſtrong impreſſion upon their minds. But admiration was all: they did not ſeriouſly conſider his words, or

* John viii. 36. † 2 Cor. vi. 2.

believe

believe his declarations. Their prejudices immediately appeared; and they began to cavil at the meanneſs of his birth and extraction. He knew what was in their hearts, and addreſſed them, probably with a particular reference to their very thoughts concerning him. He gave them to underſtand, that he was aware of their objections to his family and education, and that he expected they would demand from him the ſame miraculous operations, as he had wrought at Capernaum. But he warned them not to reject the evidence, offered to themſelves, while he maintained, that God, as a ſovereign Arbiter, is not accountable to any one; and that he has a right to diſpenſe his favours, as he pleaſes. Accordingly, many periſh, who are placed in the moſt advantageous circumſtances; and mercy is extended to others at a diſtance, whom we ſhould not have thought of. Thus he obſerved to them, that a poor Gentile widow was relieved by Elijah, while many widows in Iſrael were left to ſuffer all the ſeverities of famine:—a ſtranger and an enemy to Iſrael was cured of his leproſy by Eliſha, though the ſame dreadful diſeaſe continued to prey upon many others in the very country and under the immediate notice of the prophet. He intimated, then, that the grace of the Goſpel might be ſent to ſome remote kingdom, even among the heathens, and that they themſelves might never experience the bleſſing, but be deſtroyed through their unbelief.

This was more than they could bear: "they were filled with wrath:" and the violence of their conduct ſoon diſcovered the enmity of their hearts. Without regard to the day, the place, or the ſervice, they roſe

up

up in the utmoſt confuſion; and, with murderous rage having thruſt him out of their city, they were on the very point of caſting him down from a high precipice. But his hour was not yet come: no ſchemes could prevail to take away his life, till he was pleaſed to reſign it: and therefore by a miracle he paſſed through the midſt of them, and eſcaped unhurt.

Ah! fooliſh people and unwiſe, who ſo raſhly rejected the Saviour! We might be conſtrained to weep over their ſad caſe: but it will become us rather to be anxiouſly concerned for ourſelves. What reception does Jeſus meet with amongſt us? His Goſpel excites the admiration of many, who know no more of it than the Nazarenes. They ſoon begin to cavil, and urge a variety of objections. It is in vain to anſwer: nay, perhaps, the moſt temperate reply may increaſe their violence; nor would it be ſurpriſing, if the miniſters of Chriſt, like their Lord and Maſter, ſhould be driven away with contempt and abhorrence. Ah! what availed it to live at Nazareth, to be near to Jeſus, to obſerve his holy conduct, and to hear his gracious words? Or what avails it now, to be placed within the notice of the moſt excellent perſons, and under the moſt lively ordinances of religion? Even in ſuch circumſtances, you may feel a vehement hatred of the truth. But beware: whilſt you endeavour to get rid of that which gives you pain, you are rejecting your beſt mercies, and deſtroying your immortal ſouls.

After his eſcape at Nazareth, our Lord took up his abode for ſome time at Capernaum; a city not far diſtant, but the inhabitants, it ſhould ſeem, were of a

different

different temper and diſpoſition. Here he appears to have been particularly active in preaching on the Sabbath days; and from this place, probably his chief reſidence, he went through the whole neighbourhood, teaching in their ſynagogues, and preaching the Goſpel of the kingdom.

Do we not admire the undaunted courage and unwearied aſſiduity of our Redeemer, in labouring to promote the ſalvation of men? Though his life had been attempted in one town, he deſiſted not from his work, but vigorouſly purſued it in another. The ſame line of conduct he preſcribed to his Apoſtles; "When they perſecute you in this city, flee ye into another *." Thus, alſo, ſhould his miniſters in every age be zealous, diligent, and perſevering in their exertions for the benefit of ſouls. Inſtead of being diſcouraged by oppoſition, they ſhould renew their endeavours; and, though prevented from doing it among certain perſons, whoſe welfare they anxiouſly deſire, in different ſituations they may be more ſucceſsful.

What reception, then, did our Lord meet with at Capernaum? There were the moſt favourable and promiſing appearances: "They were aſtoniſhed at his doctrine; for his word was with power." It is probable, that much and important good was effected: for we are told, that upon this occaſion was fulfilled the prophecy of Iſaiah, "The people which ſat in darkneſs ſaw great light; and to them, which ſat in the region and ſhadow of death, light is ſprung up †."

* Mat. x. 23. † Mat. iv. 16. Iſa. ix. 1, 2,

Happy, happy people, who gladly received, what others contemptuouſly rejected; who knew the time of their viſitation, and upon whom "the Sun of righteouſneſs" ſhone with ſuch abundant ſplendour! Let us bleſs God, that our land alſo, which was once "the region and ſhadow of death," hath ſeen a great light, and that now we enjoy the meridian luſtre of a Goſpel day. Let us not be ſatisfied, however, to live in a Chriſtian country, but be ſolicitous to experience the ſaving efficacy of divine truth, which is preached and profeſſed among us. For this purpoſe, let us ſeriouſly attend to the doctrine of Chriſt. Though we have not his perſonal miniſtry, he ſtill ſpeaks to us by his faithful ſervants; and we are not afraid to aſſert, that in numerous inſtances, how weak and unworthy ſoever the inſtrument may be, "his word is with power." O for the ſacred influence of the Spirit, to apply it with energy to our hearts!

If we accompany our Lord, we ſhall perceive him diſplaying his high character by the various miracles, which he performed in that neighbourhood. He denied to the men of Nazareth, on account of their violent prejudices, thoſe clear and ſtrong evidences, which he afforded to the inhabitants of Capernaum. This, indeed, is agreeable to his uſual procedure. To humble and ſincere enquirers, he is pleaſed to give advantages and opportunities for attaining divine knowledge, which he juſtly and wiſely withholds from others. Let us be faithful according to the light we have; and he will eſtabliſh us more and more in the belief and love of the truth.

While

While Jeſus was teaching in the ſynagogue at Capernaum, a poor unhappy creature, under the influence of an evil ſpirit, miſerably tormented, cried out aloud in the aſſembly, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jeſus of Nazareth? Art thou come to deſtroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." This was a ſtriking confeſſion, perhaps unwillingly made by the Devil through an impreſſion of terror, or elſe intended to bring the character of Chriſt into ſuſpicion, as if he were really confederate with wicked demons, and ſo to lay a foundation for that objection, "He caſteth out devils through the prince of the devils *."

To ſhew that he wanted not a teſtimony of ſuch a kind, he rejected it with abhorrence, commanding the evil ſpirit to be ſilent and to come out of the man. Immediately at his word, the wretched ſufferer, after being violently convulſed, was perfectly reſtored. No wonder, that a general amazement took place, when Jeſus appeared ſo decidedly ſuperior to the powers of darkneſs, and that the fame of ſo ſingular a character was ſpread abroad through all the country.

The caſe of thoſe, who were poſſeſſed, has been the ſubject of much enquiry and no little controverſy. Many would explain away the influence of Satan, and even deny his very being, and therefore they repreſent this poſſeſſion as nothing more than a common diſeaſe. But the deſcriptions, given in the New Teſtament, ſeem utterly inconſiſtent with ſuch an interpretation;

* Mat. ix. 34.

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as the evil ſpirits were ſpoken to, and returned anſwers, diſtinct from the perſons themſelves, and ſeveral circumſtances attending them can never be accounted for by any natural diſorder whatever. Surely, there will be no inconſiſtency in allowing, according to the literal ſenſe of the ſcriptures, that the devils were then permitted to exerciſe an extraordinary power over the human body in many inſtances. Though we read or hear not of ſuch caſes in other periods of hiſtory, they might be ſuffered at that time, in order that the character of Chriſt, as our great Deliverer, and his complete victory and triumph over the prince of darkneſs, might be more clearly exhibited.

We perceive the malice of Satan, who is diſpoſed to make uſe of every method, to haraſs and torment us; and we are thankful, that his rage is reſtrained. But, though he practiſe not ſuch acts of violence, as formerly, upon the animal frame, does he therefore exert no influence, which is to be dreaded? Alas! he has yet ſo ſtrong an aſcendency over the minds of men, that many "are taken captive by him at his will *." With a deſtructive efficacy, "he now worketh in the children of diſobedience †." But we behold with love and admiration the divine Redeemer entering the liſts againſt him, and obtaining a complete conqueſt. He can "bind the ſtrong man," and let the oppreſſed go free. "For this purpoſe the Son of God was manifeſted, that he might deſtroy the works of the devil ‡:" and, during the abode of Jeſus upon earth, full

* 2 Tim. ii. 26. † Eph. ii. 2. ‡ 1 John iii. 8.

ſcope was given for determining the conflict. We may, therefore, ſafely commit ourſelves to the care of our exalted Leader, who delivers his people "from the power of darkneſs," and promiſes, "The prince of this world ſhall be caſt out *." But let us not be ſatisfied with confeſſing, "Thou art the Holy One of God." This did the unclean ſpirit; and this may we alſo do, while confederate with Satan. Our ſyſtem of faith, poſſibly, may be orthodox, and our hearts, at the ſame time, filled with impure deſires, and enſlaved to vile affections. But the Goſpel needs no ſuch advocates; nor will Jeſus accept our praiſes, or own us for his friends, whatever teſtimony we may bear for him in ſuch a ſtate.

Common diſeaſes, likewiſe, were inſtantly removed by a touch or a word. The mother of Peter's wife being dangerouſly ſick, the caſe was repreſented to him; nor was the application vain. With tender compaſſion he relieved the diſtreſs of the family, commanding the fever to depart, which threatened her life; and the cure was ſo perfect, that ſhe was immediately able to wait upon the company. We regard him ſtill as the great reſtorer of health; and his agency ſhould be acknowledged in the efficacy of what are called natural means. Phyſicians and medicines ſhould not be deſpiſed or neglected; but our dependence muſt be placed upon, and our ſupplications directed to, Him, in every time of trouble.

* John xii. 31.

No

No caſe was too hard, nor was any humble petition for his help ever rejected. " When the ſun was ſetting, all they that had any ſick with divers diſeaſes brought them unto him: and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them." This was done on the cloſe of the ſame day, in which he had been preaching at Capernaum, when the Sabbath, according to their computation, was ended: for they profeſſed ſuch a high regard for that ſacred ſeaſon, that they thought it unlawful to carry, or even to heal, their ſick, till the evening. Then alſo, in various other inſtances, he triumphed over the malice and power of Satan. He caſt out many devils, who all proclaimed him to be the Meſſiah: but he rejected their teſtimony, as before, that he might not ſeem to be acting in concert with them.

After the Sabbath had been thus ſpent, probably with much bodily fatigue, he roſe very early the next morning, " a great while before day *." Retirement, contemplation, and prayer, were the refreſhment and the ſolace, which he ſought. Bleſſed Jeſus! how does thy example reprove our ſloth and ſenſual indulgence! We allow the neceſſity of ſecret devotion; but how many excuſes do we urge for our neglect! Our time is ſuppoſed to be ſo much wanted for other engagements, that we can find little or no leiſure for this. But our Lord has taught us to deny ourſelves the gratification of ſleep, and riſe early, that we may ſecure an opportunity of waiting upon God, and thus draw

* Mark i. 35.

down from him renewed ſupplies of grace from day to day. Thoſe who are engaged in public life, have eſpecial need of this caution: for a conſtant hurry of employment, even in religious concerns, may diſtract and enervate the mind, unleſs its ſtrength be repaired by frequent retirement.

But, though privacy ſhould be ever ſo delightful to us, we muſt be content to have it interrupted. When the work of God calls us away, we muſt go with cheerfulneſs and vigour. "The people ſought him, and came unto him, and ſtayed him, that he ſhould not depart from them." It might have been agreeable to himſelf, to have fixed his abode amongſt perſons ſo much attached to him. But he reſiſted their ſolicitations; and, with eager deſire to promote the end of his miniſtry, he ſaid, "I muſt preach the kingdom of God to other cities alſo; for therefore am I ſent." Accompanied, then, by certain diſciples, he took a circuit throughout Galilee, publiſhing the glad tidings of ſalvation, and confirming his doctrine by miraculous operations. In the courſe of that journey aſtoniſhing cures were performed, and ſuch a general admiration excited, that immenſe multitudes from various and diſtant places reſorted to him *. This was a pleaſing ſight; but we know, that, with reſpect to many, they ſaw, and heard, and wondered, without any real benefit to themſelves. It is ſo now: Great numbers are drawn together by the faithful preaching of the Goſpel; and there are thoſe, who ſeem deeply affected by the

* Mat. iv. 23—25.

things

things which are ſpoken; yet, notwithſtanding their profeſſed approbation and zeal, we have no reaſon to conclude, that they feel the ſaving efficacy of the truth.

It has been obſerved, that our Lord was attended by certain diſciples, and an account is given us, at the commencement of this journey, of the manner in which four of them, viz. Peter and Andrew, James and John, were called to this attendance *. The two former, at leaſt, had been attached to his ſervice before, though not ſuch conſtant followers, as to forſake their common employments. But now, as he travelled much, their preſence and aſſiſtance upon all occaſions became more neceſſary; and it was deſigned, that, by accompanying him throughout his miniſtry, they themſelves ſhould be gradually prepared for the work. They were all of one occupation, and that of mean eſtimation in the world; for they were fiſhermen. Jeſus ſought not his Apoſtles out of the palaces of kings, or the ſchools of philoſophers: but, while he choſe the poor and the unlearned, it more evidently appeared, that "the excellency of the power" in their preaching "was of God, and not of men."

When he addreſſed himſelf to them, he found them diligently engaged in their buſineſs: and we alſo are taught to expect his favourable notice, though our time and attention be much taken up with the loweſt offices of life. The people in Galilee with great eagerneſs preſſed after him to hear his inſtructions, not merely in the ſynagogues, but wherever he went. On one oc-

* Mark i. 16—20. Luke v. 1—11.

casion, therefore, we perceive him delivering his doctrines by the sea shore, and out of Peter's vessel.

When this was done, that he might encourage Peter and his three companions the more cheerfully to follow him, by affording them a sort of typical representation of the wonderful effects, which should be produced by their ministry, he desired them to launch into the deep, and let down their nets. Peter replied, that they had laboured all night in vain, but that, animated by his direction, they would make another attempt. He, that gave the word, commanded success, and proved that he was Lord of the whole creation: through his influence, an immense multitude of fishes were brought to the net and taken up, so as to fill them all with amazement. The presence of the God of nature was acknowledged; and Peter in particular, overwhelmed with confusion and terror, under a sense of his unworthiness and unfitness to stand before such an exalted Personage, cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The Saviour, however, instantly dispersed his fears, and then explained the miracle, as exhibiting an event of far greater consequence, the success of his preaching, since from that time he should "catch men."

Now they could not hesitate to devote themselves wholly to his service: for what had they to dread? With readiness, therefore, they forsook their worldly occupations and connections, no longer anxious about their nets, their ships, or their friends; and, at his invitation, became his constant followers. Nor did their Lord disappoint the hopes, which he gave them. When three

three thousand souls were converted by their ministry on the day of Pentecost, they appeared indeed to "catch men," and a far more stupendous miracle was wrought, than this draught of fishes.

Shall not WE, also, confess and adore the divine power of Jesus? But let us not say, "Depart from me, O Lord;" but rather, "Come, Lord, to my help, for I am a sinful man: Come, and subdue, as well as pardon, mine iniquity, that I perish not, as I deserve!" But are we willing to follow Christ? And do we resolve to forsake all, though not exactly as the Apostles did, yet fully and deliberately to give up and to suffer, whatever he may require? If not, we cannot be his disciples. O may that same energy, which so disposed their minds, be exerted upon us! Especially, may the ministers of Christ, in our day, obey his call! May they be furnished for their office, by an abundant measure of faith, love, and zeal, and so taught to cast the net of the Gospel, that they also may catch men, and bring them to the knowledge and the service of their divine Master! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 8.

The first part of our Lord's sermon on the mount, containing the eight beatitudes.

IF we consider, what manner of person Jesus was, how uncommon the works he performed, and the instructions he delivered, we shall not be surprised, that immense multitudes flocked to him from every quarter. We shall rather wonder, that they were not more deeply affected by what they saw and heard, and that so few in comparison became sincere converts and disciples. During his abode in Galilee, when he perceived himself surrounded by a numerous assembly, with generous compassion for their souls he seized the opportunity to preach a sermon of peculiar extent and importance, in which he declared, more publicly and expressly, than he had done before, the purposes of his coming, and explained more clearly the spiritual nature of his kingdom *. "He went up into a mountain," probably that his voice might reach to a greater distance, and, according to the custom of the Jewish

* Mat. v. 1, &c.

teachers,

teachers, he was feated whilft he gave his inftruction. His difciples were his near attendants, and to them in a more immediate manner he directed fome parts of his difcourfe, whilft many things concerned the multitudes at large. With peculiar folemnity "he opened his mouth, and taught them" with fuch wifdom and majefty as aftonifhed them all.

This fermon of our Lord upon the mount is a rich and invaluable treafure, containing inftructions of the higheft moment. We do not fay, that it is an explicit and entire declaration of the Gofpel method of falvation; for the feafon was not then come for the wondrous plan to be as fully difclofed, as it afterwards was. During the continuance of Jefus upon earth, before he had finifhed the myftery of redemption by the facrifice of himfelf, he thought it not proper to infift, very minutely or very publicly, on the nature and reafons of his death, or on the fpiritual benefits to be received through faith in his blood. On thefe fubjects, indeed, he was not wholly filent, but he left them to be further opened to the Apoftles themfelves by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that they might communicate them to the world, after the grand event had taken place. We are, therefore, to look for a more perfect fummary and clearer account of evangelical doctrines in the apoftolical writings, than in the hiftory of our Lord's life. Some, indeed, have afferted, that nothing more need be preached to the people, than what the fermon on the mount contains; yet perhaps thefe very perfons would not be willing, that every part of this difcourfe fhould be clofely preffed upon their confciences. Let us pay all poffible

poſſible deference and reſpect to every word of Jeſus, and endeavour to enter into the full meaning and importance of this ſolemn addreſs: but let us not preſume to ſay, what ſome have abſurdly and impiouſly maintained, that this alone is ſufficient, as if every other portion of the ſcriptures might be ſafely expunged or diſregarded.

It ſeems to have been the deſign of Jeſus, on the occaſion before us, to prepare his hearers for a more cordial reception of the Goſpel, and to lead them gradually to the knowledge of himſelf. With that view he endeavoured to correct the falſe notions they had imbibed concerning his kingdom, and to impreſs upon their minds a deeper ſenſe of ſpiritual and eternal things. He ſpoke, therefore, in ſuch a manner, as to diſplay the dignity of his own character, and to ſhew the neceſſity of their ſubmiſſion to him. He pronounced benedictions, as being inveſted with ſupreme authority; he interpreted the divine law, not as a common expounder, but as the ſovereign Lawgiver, with "I SAY UNTO YOU," and repreſented the grand deciſions of the univerſal judgment as depending upon himſelf, everlaſting life or everlaſting miſery being awarded to the ſons of men according to his irreverſible ſentence.

May we liſten with reverence and profound attention to this glorious Prophet, and, while we meditate on his word, may we learn his will, and bow with unfeigned ſubjection to his command!

In the firſt part of his ſermon, he appears like the great High Prieſt, bleſſing his people. He ſpeaks,

not as from mount Sinai with thunderings and lightnings, but with invitations and promiſes of mercy. He had been already preaching, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand;" and of this his followers entertained very groſs conceptions, expecting that he would erect a temporal dominion with outward pomp and ſplendour, and exalt them to places of power and dignity. But now he ſtrikes at the root of their errors, ſhewing them that his kingdom is of a ſpiritual nature: and, after giving a deſcription, contrary to their preconceived ideas, of the tempers and bleſſedneſs of its true members, he repreſents it as indiſpenſably neceſſary, that they ſhould be diſtinguiſhed by a peculiar holineſs.

Here are eight different parts of the Chriſtian character delineated; to each of which a promiſe is annexed, and on each a bleſſing pronounced. Theſe are not to be ſeparated, as if the Chriſtian might poſſeſs no more than one of them; for they are united in the man of God, and the combination of the whole conſtitutes his excellency. There is alſo a beautiful connection between them, and one may be conſidered as leading to another.

1. "Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit." Though the Lord pays no regard to us for our outward condition, ſince "he accepteth no man's perſon," yet thoſe, who are "rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom," are generally found among "the poor of this world *;" and it muſt be allowed, that their ſituation expoſes them to

* James ii. 5.

the

the feweſt temptations. But "the haughtineſs of men" of every rank, whether poor or rich, "ſhall be bowed down *:" for thoſe only can receive the ſalvation of the Goſpel, who are ſenſible of their ſpiritual indigence. They feel and confeſs, that they are deſtitute of every thing truly valuable before God; and, having no poſſeſſions to boaſt of, they are willing to come as needy ſuppliants, that they may be relieved out of the inexhauſtible fulneſs of Jeſus. A knowledge of themſelves has taught them, that they have neither wiſdom, righteouſneſs, nor ſtrength, and under ſuch a conviction, they may conclude againſt themſelves as unfit objects for the notice of a holy God. But Jeſus ſpeaks to their caſe, and declares, not only that they may hope for, but that they have already obtained mercy. They "are bleſſed." The world may pity and deſpiſe them; but thus ſaith the Lord, who dwelleth in the heavens, "To theſe men will I look †:" nay, he hath begun to manifeſt his favour to them. "Their's is the kingdom of heaven." Of ſuch only does the Church of Chriſt below conſiſt, and from ſuch is the Church above repleniſhed. None others do ſincerely ſubmit to Jeſus, and partake of his grace; and theſe alone ſhall reign with him for ever: he hath reſerved for them "a crown of glory," and a "kingdom that cannot be moved."

2. "Bleſſed are they that mourn." Unfeigned and deep diſtreſs cannot but follow from real poverty of ſpirit. Thoſe, therefore, who know themſelves, will be "mourners in Zion." How many cauſes of ſorrow

* Iſa. ii. 11. † lxvi. 2.

do they diſcover! Their tears flow down for the ſake of others, when they behold the ſin and miſery, which are in the world. But, being in the firſt place concerned for themſelves, they weep before God with ſincere contrition, not ſo much for the preſent inconveniences or future dangers, to which their iniquities may expoſe them, as for the heinouſneſs of their conduct againſt that great and gracious Being, who has the ſtrongeſt claims to their gratitude, love, and ſervice. They may be derided for their dejection of mind, as if they were loſt to all happineſs: but it is otherwiſe; "They, that ſow in tears, ſhall reap in joy *." It is a peculiar mercy to be brought into this very ſtate: for now it appears, that the Lord hath a tender regard to them. He "hath begun a good work in them," the effect of which, though painful for the preſent, will be "quietneſs and aſſurance for ever †." The lips of truth declare, "they ſhall be comforted." Perhaps they fear, "they ſhall lie down in ſorrow;" but, under the influence of the Holy Ghoſt "the Comforter," they ſhall receive ſtrong conſolation. Through a diſcovery of the power and grace of Jeſus, they ſhall be "filled with all joy and peace in believing:" and ſoon ſhall every tear be wiped from their eyes, when they ſhall be admitted to complete and uninterrupted happineſs in heaven.

3. "Bleſſed are the meek." Wherever there is a proper apprehenſion of the nature of ſin, a total renovation takes place in the affections of the mind.

* Pſal. cxxvi. 5. † Iſa. xxxii. 17.

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"The lofty looks of man are humbled," and the fiercenefs of his temper is reftrained. Such is the origin of true fpiritual meeknefs, which will produce an humble deportment towards God and man. Thofe, who are partakers of this grace, will bow down with fubmiffion to the fovereign will of God, without murmuring or cavilling at his appointments or commands, and, fenfible of their own ignorance, will implore and obey his guidance. With refpect to their fellow creatures, they will not be forward or affuming, but "take the loweft room;" not peevifh or felf-willed, but kind and gentle; not eafily provoked, or implacable under injuries, but they will return good for evil, bleffing for curfing. The world in general are fo oppofite, that thefe perfons may, probably, be fcorned as men of mean and little minds, deftitute of all proper firmnefs and dignity. But the grace of God is upon them; and he, who hath implanted this difpofition in them, will teftify his approbation. They are happy; and none others have any true fatisfaction; for all thofe affections, contrary to meeknefs, fuch as pride, anger, cruelty, and revenge, imbitter the fpirit and invariably produce mifery. But "the meek fhall inherit the earth, and fhall delight themfelves in the abundance of peace *." They tafte the fweetnefs of life, and have the moft exalted pleafures which earth can afford; for inward tranquillity gives the higheft relifh to every enjoyment in this world: and thefe only fhall "inherit the land" of blifs

* Pfal. xxxvii. 11.

and glory, of which the land of Canaan was a type, "and dwell therein for ever *."

4. "Blessed are they, which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." With what eagerness do men in general pursue present objects! But they, who are under a divine influence, have fixed their supreme and most ardent affections upon things spiritual and eternal; and these they covet with a vehemence, which resembles our natural longings for meat and drink, when we suffer the extremities of hunger and thirst. In preference to every other object, they desire to possess "the righteousness of God;" that righteousness, which will answer the demands of his law, and that also, by which alone they can serve him with acceptance upon earth, and be fitted for the complete and everlasting fruition of him in heaven. From a conviction of their guilt and depravity they perceive their inability to justify themselves; and then, with the utmost importunity enquire, "How shall man be just with God!" They feel likewise a want of conformity, in their hearts and lives, to the will of God; yet cannot be satisfied without it. While they contend with the corrupt affections of the soul, they pant after its total renovation, and pray most fervently, to be "holy in all manner of conversation."

Happy indeed is the man, in whom desires like these are excited! They are not the wishes of sensualists or worldlings, but of them only, whom God hath blessed; and he will give them more grace. They shall not

* Psal. xxxvii. 29.

be disappointed, but abundantly gratified by a ready communication of those benefits, which they so ardently covet: "they shall be filled." The Lord "satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness *." They shall be completely justified through the righteousness of their Redeemer, and shall stand with confidence before God: being sanctified by the Spirit, they shall persevere in righteousness and true holiness. They are, therefore, encouraged to indulge the most delightful expectations: "Let the heart of them rejoice, that seek the Lord †."

5. "Blessed are the merciful." Such, as have been now described, will not confine their attention to themselves; but, having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," will feel compassion for their fellow-creatures, and shew mercy according to their abilities and opportunities. There will be various occasions for the exercise of this temper, owing to the ignorance, sin, and misery, which have overspread the world. They will, therefore, consult the happiness and welfare of all around them, and, under the strong influence of Christian benevolence, will endeavour to please and profit them. Accordingly, they will give "the soft answer," which "turneth away wrath;" and "in their tongues will be the law of kindness," because the law of love governs their hearts. This will also be evinced by their actions, as well as professions. They will cheerfully relieve the necessitous, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick. Nor will their

* Psal. cvii. 9. † cv. 3.

compaſſionate regard be confined to the body; but, with generous concern for the ſouls of men, they will deſire to warn the careleſs and inſtruct the ignorant, if ſo be they may bring them into the way of righteouſneſs and peace.

Theſe alone poſſeſs real tenderneſs and liberality of mind; and it muſt be generally allowed, that ſuch perſons are the moſt happy in themſelves, an ornament to religion, and a bleſſing to ſociety where they live. But they are of a heavenly extraction, born from above. The merciful temper, here deſcribed, is ſo contrary to the natural ſelfiſhneſs and cruelty of the human heart, as to form a ſtrong evidence of divine grace. Theſe, then, are they, who are truly "bleſſed;" and "they ſhall obtain mercy." This is the character of all, whom God hath reconciled to himſelf; by ſuch marks they are to be known and diſtinguiſhed: and it is an unwarrantable preſumption to imagine ourſelves in the favour of Heaven, without this influence of the Spirit, diſpoſing us to ſhew favour to our fellow-creatures upon earth.

6. "Bleſſed are the pure in heart." The Lord is a God of purity, who "deſires truth in the inward parts," and is not to be impoſed on by any external diſplay or pretences of piety. But ah! "how abominable and filthy is man *!" He has "yielded his members ſervants to uncleanneſs," his "mind and conſcience is defiled," his "heart deſperately wicked †." We muſt, therefore, not merely be reformed, as to

* Job xv. 16. † Rom. vi. 19. Tit. i. 15. Jer. xvii. 9.

groſs immoralities, but "renewed in the ſpirit of our mind *." The ſubjects of Chriſt's kingdom are "born again," their principles are changed, their tempers ſanctified. They renounce all iniquity, not in appearance or profeſſion only, but with a cordial deſire and determination never more to return to it. They cheerfully "yield themſelves unto God," and he is pleaſed to make their hearts his own habitation through the Spirit. Theſe, then, are "the bleſſed of the Lord:" for, however they muſt deny themſelves many ſenſual gratifications, the Lord God hath beſtowed upon them nobler enjoyments. They are ſeparated from the world: but he hath conſecrated and united them to himſelf; and it ought to ſuffice, that "they ſhall ſee God." Even here, he will manifeſt his grace and glory, and "lift up the light of his countenance upon them." And can any earthly delights be compared with their happineſs, when they are favoured with his viſits, and the diſcoveries of his love? Yet this is only an earneſt of their future felicity. Soon ſhall the vail, which now in a great meaſure hides from them the brightneſs of his face, be entirely removed; and, when admitted to that beatific viſion, they ſhall be transformed into his righteous image. "We ſhall be like him; for we ſhall ſee him, as he is:"—"and ſo ſhall we ever be with the Lord †."

7. "Bleſſed are the peace-makers." In ſuch a world as this, various contentions may be expected, which will prove and evidence our characters and diſ-

* Eph. iv. 23. † 1 John iii. 2. 1 Theſſ. iv. 17.

poſitions.

positions. Amidst warm and angry debates, the men of grace will be distinguished by their labouring for peace. They "study to be quiet," and to promote harmony in their families and neighbourhood, willing rather to sacrifice their own interest, than bitterly to strive for it. Having much forgiven them, they refuse not to forgive a brother, though offending "seventy times seven;" but eagerly embrace him, and renew their assurances of kindness. It grieves them to observe discord among others, and as far as their influence will extend, they endeavour to repair the breach, and effect a reconciliation. This is indeed a happy temper, and we need not fear to pronounce the possessors of it "blessed," not only as enjoying a sweet tranquillity of mind, but as having in themselves an evidence of the divine favour. For, by their resemblance of him, who is the God of peace and love, they prove their relation to him, and shall be taken notice of under the honourable distinction of his children. They are "born of God," who has put his Spirit upon them; and as children, they are heirs; heirs of the kingdom, where all will be united in bonds of strictest union for ever and ever.

One would think that a character so excellent must meet with universal esteem and respect among men. No: it is quite otherwise. As "the friendship of the world is enmity with God*," all, who bear his image, must look for contempt and hatred from those, who are in a state of opposition to him. But we add, according to our Lord's declaration,

* James iv. 4.

8. "Bleſſed are they, which are perſecuted for righteouſneſs' ſake." The ſaints of God are a conſtant reproof to the wicked, who, from that very circumſtance, are often extremely mortified, and frequently enraged. Hence it generally happens, that the more eminently holy, zealous, and uſeful any perſons are, the more malignity and violence they meet with. But, while they ſuffer for their attachment to the Saviour, in the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs, let them take up their croſs with faith and patience, and not lament their caſe as ſevere and calamitous. He, who has ſeparated them to himſelf from the midſt of an evil world, as his own peculiar people, will ſupport and comfort them; and, whatever temporal loſſes they may ſuſtain in his ſervice, he will beſtow an abundant recompenſe. They may, poſſibly, be excluded from earthly poſſeſſions, but they ſhall inherit the kingdom of everlaſting glory.

The character, laſt mentioned, ſo exactly deſcribed our Lord's diſciples, who ſtood by him, and whom it was neceſſary to encourage in the proſpect of their approaching ſufferings, that he made a particular application of it to them. While he pronounced his benediction, he taught them to expect ſcorn, oppoſition, and infamy, for their adherence to him, even though they were ever ſo circumſpect in their conduct. But he called upon them to maintain a holy confidence and joy, and to exult in the lively hope of the glorious reward, remembering that all the Patriarchs and Prophets of old had trodden the ſame path, and endured the ſame croſs.

Let

Let the diſciples of Jeſus in every age be reminded, that they alſo ſhould look for ſimilar treatment from the world, and that it will become them to be equally bold and vigorous in the ſervice of their Lord and Maſter; ſince to them likewiſe "are given exceeding great and precious promiſes." And let all, who profeſs a regard to the Saviour, attend to the ſucceeding admonitions of his ſermon, in which he has enjoined upon them the moſt exemplary and diſtinguiſhed holineſs. For our divine Teacher added, "Ye are the ſalt of the earth," deſigned to prevent a general corruption, and to diffuſe the ſacred influence of truth and righteouſneſs. In this view, how widely may your uſefulneſs extend! But, if you forget your character, and ſo far loſe your ſpirituality and zeal, as to become like ſalt, which is deprived of all its virtue, you will incur a peculiar meaſure of contempt and abhorrence. You are exalted to an eminent ſituation, which calls for conſtant circumſpection and unremitting diligence: as elevated objects attract a nice, invidious attention, ſo your whole temper and deportment will be narrowly obſerved. Nor ſhould you think it enough, barely to eſcape cenſure; you are raiſed up, and furniſhed with talents for the benefit of others, whoſe beſt intereſt, therefore, you ſhould ſtudy to promote. Conceal not your gifts, but labour to improve them for general good. Like the grand luminary of heaven, you are intended, in your ſphere of action, to give light to them who are in darkneſs. Be careful, then, ſo to live, that all men may ſee, what they ought to be, and perceiving the nature and excellence of true religion, through-

out your ſpirit and conduct, may be led to admire and praiſe the grace of God in you, and perſuaded to tread in your ſteps, to the glory of your God and Father."

To this purpoſe, and ſo practical in their tendency, were the exhortations of Jeſus. Now, if it be allowed, that the eſſence of Chriſtianity is the ſame, which it was originally, thoſe only are to be accounted real Chriſtians in our day, who anſwer to the deſcriptions here given. We aſk, then, if you deſire to partake of the bleſſings, do you ſincerely comply with the injunctions, of the Goſpel? Let us advert to thoſe, we have now conſidered, Are you "poor in ſpirit;" emptied of your ſelf-ſufficiency, and willing to be indebted to the grace of Jeſus for your whole ſalvation? Are you ſenſible of your guilt, and do you "mourn" for ſin, with a godly ſorrow? You may, poſſibly, ſhed many tears; but are they tears of genuine repentance? Do you underſtand, what it is to be "meek, and lowly in heart?" Is the haughtineſs of your carnal mind ſubdued, ſo that you can "eſteem others better than yourſelves?" On what are your affections chiefly fixed? Is this the object, that you may attain "the righteouſneſs of God," and, being accepted of him, that you may ſerve him in true holineſs? But do you feel any ardour of deſire after it, and labour for it, as for your neceſſary food? Have you any "bowels and mercies?" And, with an abhorrence of your natural ſelfiſhneſs, do you "open your hand wide," as opportunities are given you, for the relief and comfort of the diſtreſſed? Again, are your conſciences purged? Do you dread the thought of reſting in "a form of godlineſs;" and do you poſ-

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ſeſs real purity, the inward ſanctification of the Spirit? "As much as lieth in you," do you "live peaceably with all men;" avoiding quarrels, and endeavouring to reconcile contending parties? And of what ſort is your reputation in the world? Is your religion offenſive to any? Or are you willing to incur reproach for Chriſt's ſake, anxious rather to promote the honour of God by your exemplary conduct, than to ſecure public favour to yourſelves?

If you are deſtitute of theſe evidences of grace, we dare not pronounce you "bleſſed." No: we muſt faithfully warn you, that you deceive not your own ſelves. Amongſt men you may, poſſibly, be accounted happy; but the God of heaven declares you accurſed. Be ſolicitous, therefore, to be reſcued out of your preſent wretched ſituation, and cry with importunity, "O Lord, remember us with the favour that thou beareſt unto thy people; O viſit us with thy ſalvation; that we may ſee the good of thy choſen, that we may rejoice in the gladneſs of thy nation, that we may glory with thine inheritance *!" Amen.

* Pſal. cvi. 4, 5.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 9.

The second part of our Lord's sermon on the mount, in which he expounded certain precepts of the moral law.

THE multitudes, who flocked around the Saviour, were, probably, very eager to know, what new doctrine he would preach, or averse to receive him from an apprehension that he undervalued and meant to subvert the goodly system, which the Old Testament established, and of which they boasted. To give them, therefore, the necessary information concerning himself, and to remove their prejudices, he solemnly asserted, that he came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil *.

Since the Lord God changeth not, one revelation cannot be repugnant to another. Yet there may be in one age a more full and express declaration of the divine will, than in the preceding: and the former communications might be intended to prepare the way for a clearer manifestation of the same truths. Thus, in fact, the increase of sacred light has resembled the gradual approach of day. The great plan of redemp-

* Mat. v. 17, &c.

tion

tion was intimated to Adam upon his fall, and in ſucceeding generations freſh and brighter diſcoveries of it were afforded to the Church, under the Moſaic diſpenſation, and by various prophets, till the appearing of Jeſus Chriſt, to whom, as to one common object, they all referred. He came not, therefore, to overturn the fabric, already built, but to eſtabliſh and complete it; not to contradict any foregoing revelation, but to unfold the grand ſcheme, and perfect the whole. Agreeably to this account of the matter,

1. He anſwered the types of the ceremonial law. They were only the ſhadow, but he was the ſubſtance. In themſelves they would have been weak, trifling, and abſurd; but, as prefiguring the Saviour and deriving an efficacy from him, they were important and worthy of all reſpect, during their intended continuance. They had their full accompliſhment in Jeſus; and, therefore, he ſet them aſide, not as if they had been of no uſe, but becauſe he was in himſelf every thing, which they were deſigned to repreſent.

2. He explained and enforced the moral law. This is the everlaſting rule of righteouſneſs, the grand obligations of which depend not on any peculiar circumſtances of ſituation, but exiſt the ſame in all ages and places. For God muſt ever require his rational creatures to love him with all their hearts, and one another as themſelves. This law Jeſus "magnified and made honourable;" for by his own obedience and expiatory ſufferings he ſhewed the extent and equity of its demands, by his ſpiritual expoſition he vindicated it from

falſe interpretations, and by his holy precepts he enjoined its obſervance upon all his people. From this view of the ſubject it appears, that believers, though releaſed from its penal ſanctions, are ſtill indiſpenſably bound to regulate their tempers and conduct, agreeably to its directions.

3. He hath alſo completed the deſign of all former diſpenſations, and ſupplied their defects. The days of the Son of man, therefore, are called "the laſt days," becauſe no ſucceeding revelation is to be expected. Patriarchs and Prophets looked forwards to his incarnation, and paved the way for him; and now, ſince he has come, and accompliſhed every thing predicted, nothing more is wanted, either to diſcover the will of God or to make reconciliation for us. What thanks, and love, and ſervice, do we owe for our diſtinguiſhed privileges under the Goſpel! And what returns are due to Him, who hath perfected for ever the great work of our ſalvation!

Our Lord proceeded in his ſermon to maintain the authority and full extent of the law, declaring, that God will not recede from his righteous demands, and conſequently, that either obedience muſt be paid, or puniſhment inflicted. Wilfully, therefore, to tranſgreſs the leaſt of theſe precepts, and encourage others to do the ſame, as if they might be diſpenſed with, would render us unfit for a place in his kingdom; and to be diſtinguiſhed in that ſociety, we muſt yield an univerſal ſubmiſſion to them, though they may ſeem ever ſo trifling, and enforce the ſame conduct upon others.

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While Jesus inculcated the necessity of holiness, it is probable that the people fixed their attention on the Scribes and Pharisees, whom they held in high veneration for their professions of sanctity. It would, therefore, astonish them to hear this new Teacher, requiring his disciples to go much farther than those, whom they considered as the most eminent patterns of religion, and asserting that otherwise they could have no place in heaven. But it was proper to expose these vain pretenders, to detect their errors and hypocrisy, and to warn their deluded followers no longer to be led by them, who were of all men most opposite to the temper of Christianity. They boasted much of their attachment to the divine law, while, in reality, they could not bear the strict and spiritual sense, in which it ought to be understood, and, by their subtle interpretations, explained away much of its meaning. Jesus, however, has instructed us, contrary to their glosses, that it enjoins perfect holiness, in the dispositions of the mind, as well as the practice of the life. Their righteousness was merely external; for all their works were done "to be seen of men:" but we are taught to seek for inward purity, and not to be satisfied with regularity of manners, or a shew of piety. They were influenced, even in their religious duties, by base principles, "for a pretence making long prayers," and boasting of their own works, as if the happiness of heaven were no more than a just recompense of their deserts. But we are warned of the sin and danger of trusting to ourselves, whatever our attainments may be, and of the necessity

neceſſity of a better obedience than our own, to procure our juſtification before God.

From a general declaration, our Lord deſcended to a particular expoſition of the ſpiritual nature of the law, in certain precepts, which had been ſhamefully perverted; guarding the people againſt their erroneous teachers, and requiring their attention and ſubmiſſion to himſelf.

1. He inſiſted on the extenſive meaning of the ſixth commandment. This was underſtood, as if it had forbidden nothing more than the actual and open commiſſion of wilful murder. But Jeſus, the great Lawgiver, inſtructs us, that it condemns whatever may lead to ſuch violence, and, therefore, that all cauſeleſs anger or deſire of revenge, and all opprobrious language, ariſing from this vehemence of paſſion, will juſtly expoſe us to the divine vengeance. Accordingly, it were vain to worſhip God, or expect any advantage from his ordinances, ſo long as the heart remains under the influence of malignant diſpoſitions. We muſt lay aſide our animoſities, and conſent to make reſtitution for injuries committed, when we would "compaſs God's altar;" for the moſt coſtly ſacrifices and profeſſions of the warmeſt devotion will not compenſate the want of brotherly love. Common prudence, alſo, as well as religion, requires that contentions be dropped and a reconciliation effected, as ſoon as may be. If you are threatened with a ſuit by one, whom you have offended, how much better is it by a ſpeedy accommodation to repair the breach, than obſtinately to perſiſt in the conteſt, till matters are brought to an extremity,

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and rigorous juſtice muſt have its courſe! If it be thus in human affairs, how much more is it your intereſt and duty, without a moment's delay, to ſeek peace with the Lord God Almighty, whom you have provoked; leſt, being ſummoned to his bar, you be caſt in the trial, and ſentenced to the infernal priſon, from which there can be no releaſe!

Such was the ſubſtance of our Lord's addreſs: and ſhall we not allow the ſuitableneſs of it to ourſelves? Or ſhall we boaſt, like the Phariſees, that, becauſe we have not ſhed the blood of a fellow-creature, the ſixth commandment has no charge againſt us? Are we free from all violence of temper? Or have our tongues never betrayed the vindictive deſires of our hearts? Are we now at peace? Or have we, at leaſt, anxiouſly ſought for it? And when we lift up our hands in prayer, is it "without wrath?" We may thank God, that ſo many powerful reſtraints are laid upon the ſinful affections of men; or elſe every part of the world would preſent us with ſcenes of horrible confuſion. But, though our fury may be repreſſed, ſo as not to break forth to the diſturbance of ſociety, God may behold much iniquity within us. For it is poſſible, that, where a calmneſs and benevolence of ſpirit are pretended, much rancour may remain in the heart: and, in God's account, "whoſoever hateth his brother is a murderer *."

2. He opened the ſpiritual and extenſive nature of the ſeventh commandment. Here alſo, as in the preceding inſtance, the prohibition had been confined to

* 1 John iii. 15.

merely external acts; and he only was deemed an adulterer, who had been guilty of the grossest uncleanness. But Jesus teaches us, that inward impurity brings us under the divine condemnation, that a lustful desire and a wanton eye are forbidden in the full sense of the law, no less than the absolute violation of the marriage bed. And will any person say, I have never felt any such irregular motions in my heart: my eye hath never wandered in a lascivious manner? Let us remember, that we are always open to the inspection of that God, who "searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," and that he hath noted down all our secret imaginations, looks, and wishes. Let us not presume to justify ourselves before him.

If we would avoid the sin of lewdness, we are to resist every secret propensity to it, and subdue the corrupt affections of the flesh. This must be done at any pains or expense, as Jesus has instructed us: the inordinate desire is to be abandoned, though it may seem as dear to us as a right eye, or profitable as a right hand, though it may be as severe a trial to part with it, as to cut off the most tender and useful member of the body. For, as in chirurgery, a gangrene must be stopped, or else death ensues; so here, the most favourite passion must be given up: there is no room for hesitation; it must be done, or else everlasting destruction in the torments of hell will be the consequence.

Our Lord was naturally led from the exposition of the seventh commandment to condemn the prevailing practice of divorcing their wives, as fancy, disgust, or resentment might dictate. Separations, indeed, had

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been allowed by the Mosaic law under certain restrictions; but the permission had been abused to the worst purposes; and we are now taught, that nothing but unfaithfulness in the wife can absolve the husband from the obligations of the marriage bond. Alas! it is too evident from the state of things among ourselves, that, with respect to this important subject, the authority of Christ is but little regarded, and that the chastity and continence, which he inculcated, are most shamefully violated.

3. He expounded also the third commandment. The heinousness of perjury, which is a solemn appeal to God in attestation of a lie, was generally acknowledged among the Jews. But they shewed a manifest contempt of the majesty of God by the frequency of their oaths in common conversation. And it should seem, that they so interpreted the law, as to justify the practice of swearing, if they abstained only from the express mention of God, or did not call upon him to confirm a falshood. How ingenious is the depraved nature of man in perverting the truth, and inventing arguments for the vindication of his own evil conduct! For, agreeably to our Lord's representation, we may ask, What do you, when you swear by any creature? Your appeal in effect is, and must ultimately be, to the great Creator himself, though it contain not any direct invocation of his name. It is therefore enjoined, that you "swear not at all."

We are not forbidden to make use of oaths in a solemn manner, and for important purposes, in support of the truth: for these were commanded in the old Testament,

Teſtament, and unexceptionable examples are recorded in the new. But Jeſus preſcribes a rule only for our common converſation. Inaſmuch as it is an inſult to Jehovah, to introduce him as a witneſs or an arbiter of our trifling controverſies in familiar diſcourſe, we are required to avoid all ſtrong and vehement aſſeverations, and only ſimply to affirm or deny, without having recourſe to any other expedient to eſtabliſh our credit. For not merely the groſs expreſſions of profaneneſs, but all thoſe cuſtomary forms of ſpeaking, by which men endeavour to ſtrengthen and ſupport their declarations, ariſe from evil habits and wrong tempers, or perhaps from Satan himſelf, who in various ways ſolicits us to ſin.

Let us not, then, be ſatisfied, barely to abſtain from the palpable violations of the commandment by perjury or impious execrations, but regulate our converſation with " ſimplicity and godly ſincerity." How little is this attended to! Is not the name of God frequently introduced, in a light and trifling manner, as an embelliſhment of diſcourſe, or an expreſſion of ſurpriſe? Do we not adopt certain faſhionable phraſes, which have the nature of oaths, or lead to them? Alas! the practice is general; and thus God is provoked among us every day. For, to paſs by the multitude of perjured perſons and blaſphemers, we obſerve that the ſacred appellations and titles of God and his Chriſt are treated with the utmoſt levity or contempt, being conſtantly uſed as words of courſe or the mere expletives of language, by many who boaſt of their morality, and poſſeſs the faireſt reputation in the world.

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4. He guarded against a misunderstanding of the Mosaic law of retaliation. A precept had been given for the direction of magistrates in the punishment of injuries; for they were authorized to take "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." This had been interpreted, as if private persons might avenge themselves for any assault, and requite the offenders in kind. But Jesus teaches us, that it belongs not to individuals to vindicate their own wrongs, and that appeals to the law should not be made for losses of small consequence. He forbids us to "resist evil," and enjoins a meek and patient submission to the violence and injustice of others. This he has inculcated in certain proverbial expressions, which admit not of a literal interpretation. It is not difficult, however, to collect from them, that a malicious, vindictive mind is totally opposite to true religion; that, rather than furiously withstand or retaliate one injury, we ought to expose ourselves to a second; that it were better quietly to sustain any trifling damage, such as a blow on the face or the loss of a garment, than rigorously insist upon a compensation; and that our benevolence should be so extensive, that no suitable opportunity of doing good should be neglected.

It is easier to find the meaning, as to the substance at least, than to make the application. Who among us are willing to be directed by this divine Teacher? The temper of real Christians and that of worldly men are quite contrary to each other: and to fulfil the law of Christ would subject us to the reproach of cowardice and meanness of spirit. Be it so: let us cheerfully

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bear the imputation. That ſenſe of honour, which is ſo much contended for, is a principle moſt odious to God,—as it implies a vindictive diſpoſition, or, what muſt lead to it, a determination not to paſs by the moſt trifling offence. We need not, then, reflect upon the Scribes and Phariſees; as retaliation is practiſed and juſtified among ourſelves. Whoever inſults the man of honour muſt anſwer it at the peril of his life. Nay, do we not all, under provocations, feel a deſire of revenge? And have we not been betrayed into ſuch a conduct, as our Lord has here condemned? He, however, has given us an example of forbearance, as well as the precept. May we ſtudy to attain "the mind, which was in Chriſt Jeſus!"

5. He inculcated the law of univerſal love. It was allowed to be a divine command, that we ſhould love our neighbours; but, as if neighbours included only thoſe, who are nearly related or intimately connected, the command was ſo expounded, that it was judged right, perhaps expedient, to treat thoſe with contempt and rancour, who were of a different country or religion. How unwarrantable and impious an interpretation! Jeſus, therefore, reſtored and vindicated the ſenſe of God's ancient law. He has taught us, that no one, however malevolently diſpoſed, is a proper object of our abhorrence, and no injurious uſage a ſufficient reaſon for withholding the kindeſt offices of Chriſtian benevolence. He has inſtructed us, that, as the children of God poſſeſs peculiar privileges, they muſt ſurpaſs all others in a ſpirit of forgiveneſs and diſ-

interefted goodnefs, and prove their relation to their heavenly Father by their refemblance of him.

What fhall we fay to thefe things? Have we fo learned Chrift, as to love our enemies? It were eafy to profefs this enlarged philanthropy, while we enjoy the general countenance and favour of the world. But can we ftand "the fiery trial," and, under the moft injurious perfecutions, return good for evil? Are we not eafily offended, and hardly reconciled; "implacable, unmerciful?" And is this the temper of mind, which becomes the heirs of heaven? "What do we more than others?" Or wherein do we differ from them, who know not God? What fimilitude do we bear to him, whom we call our Father? "God is love;" and, if we feel not the power of that principle, we are not renewed after his likenefs, nor can we dwell with him.

But fhall we not own, that the divine law, in the extenfive fenfe which is here given, is moft excellent? Can we object to it, as an unneceffary ftrictnefs; or fuppofe, that a holy God can require lefs? Is not every injunction perfectly reafonable, and well calculated to promote univerfal happinefs? Or, would it be better, if we were allowed to harbour in our hearts the leaft degree of anger, luft, or revenge?

Yet fuch a view muft abafe our pride: for who fhall dare to boaft, "We have done our duty?" Have we not fatisfied ourfelves with a partial, and merely external obedience; without attempting to regulate the inward defires of the mind? "The commandment is exceeding broad *." And each particular precept, in the fpiritual

* Pfal. cxix. 96.

meaning, proves that we are all in a ſtate of guilt and condemnation. Let the conviction have its full influence; and we ſhall then welcome the Saviour, who "is the end of the law for righteouſneſs to every one that believeth *."

Believers, however, as before obſerved, though "juſtified from all things," are by no means releaſed from their obligations to holineſs. Does Jeſus ſpeak, as if the law were deſigned to be abrogated, or to be no longer binding upon his people? Is it not, on the contrary, ſtrongly enforced for the direction of our conduct? Here, then, we ſhould ſtudy, "what manner of perſons we ought to be," how far ſuperior to others, "in all holy converſation and godlineſs." Our impartial and conſtant regard to duty will be the ſafeſt evidence of our faith; and without it our expectations of the divine favour are no better than the hope of the hypocrite, which ſhall periſh.

* Rom. x. 4.

JESUS

SECT. 10.

The third part of our Lord's ſermon on the mount, in which he cautioned his diſciples againſt vain-glory and the love of the world.

THE neceſſity of religion is generally acknowledged; whilſt the nature of it is but little underſtood. Many comply with the forms, and put on the ſemblance, of piety, and fancy themſelves devout, becauſe they are ſo accounted, at the very time that they are under the influence of the baſeſt diſpoſitions. Such were the Phariſees of old, who, with all their boaſted goodneſs, betrayed an hatred of the doctrine and genius of Chriſtianity. It became expedient, therefore, for our Lord to expoſe their real character, to guard his hearers againſt their erroneous notions, and ſhew how eſſentially different his diſciples muſt be. This he did throughout his ſermon on the mount.

In that part of his diſcourſe, to which we now proceed, he gave the moſt ſolemn cautions to his followers, to beware eſpecially of the two dangerous principles, vain-glory and the love of the world, by which the

Pharisees were actuated *. For notwithstanding their high pretences to devotion, and the admiration in which they were held, their religion proceeded from pride, and consisted with an inordinate attachment to present things. Our righteousness must be of another sort: or else, we cannot be the subjects of Christ's kingdom, however frequent or assiduous we may be in the external observances of divine worship. Let us pray, that He, who alone knows our secret desires and purposes, would discover to us and eradicate every motive and affection of our hearts, incompatible with true Christianity, that we may not be found destitute of that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

I. We are cautioned against vain-glory, or that ostentatious display of our own goodness, which is meant to catch the notice, and procure the admiration, of men. An arrogant spirit, which is always contemptible, is never more preposterous, than when it assumes the mask of piety. It were the height of absurdity and profaneness, to practise those very duties, which should proceed from the deepest humility, and cannot be acceptable without it, merely to gratify a conceited and ambitious temper: and yet it is a common case. The most painful and mortifying injunctions are submitted to, in order to gain a character. Persons professing godliness have peculiar need to guard against this principle; for they are not so much in danger from sensual as from spiritual wickedness. They are often overtaken and deceived, even in their best services, by the

* Mat. vi. 1, &c.

secret

ſecret workings of pride, which, while it conceals itſelf from the niceſt obſervation, influences and corrupts the whole conduct. Our Lord, therefore, mentions ſeveral inſtances of religious acts, which we may be tempted to perform entirely or chiefly with a view to the eſteem of our fellow-creatures; and on this account he calls upon us to "take heed."

1. Alms-giving. The duty is not in this place commanded; but it is ſuppoſed, that every diſciple of Jeſus will practiſe it: and it is univerſally allowed among Chriſtians, that we are under indiſpenſable obligations to relieve the diſtreſſed, according to our abilities. But our attention is here directed to the proper principle of obedience. Alms are to be given, from a ſupreme regard to God, not to men. Hypocrites, we find, can diſtribute large ſums, for the purpoſes of charity. But uſually they are oſtentatious; and, as they ſeek the praiſe of the world, they fail not to publiſh their own liberality, and contrive that it may be of ſuch a ſort, or exerted at ſuch times and places, as will engage general notice and eſteem. The motive being wrong throughout, the moſt extenſive munificence, on this plan, cannot be an acceptable ſervice. Surrounding ſpectators and witneſſes, who look only on the outward appearance, may expreſs their admiration; but the Lord God, who is forgotten and deſpiſed, ſince the ſacrifice is not offered to Him, will beſtow no recompenſe. Yet even theſe perſons "have their reward." Many are ready to compliment them for their generoſity, and court their favour; but this, which is all

they will receive, is a poor benefit indeed, fleeting as a breath of air!

How different is the disciple of Jesus! His aim is to approve himself to God; and to be consistent, he should be as glad to embrace a private, as a public opportunity of doing good. Secret liberality is, also, particularly pleasing to God, since it springs from a pure regard to Him, and solicits not human applause; and He, who beholds our inward purpose, will make an open acknowledgment of it, before the whole universe, in the great day.

But do we not stand reproved either for avarice or pride? Are we "ready to distribute, willing to communicate?" Are we seeking out those objects of charity, who are concealed from the view of the world? Or are we not, rather, forward to proclaim our own bounty; or, at least, most disposed to lend our assistance, where we shall probably obtain notice and admiration? But, if we have such respect to the opinions of men, we are acting from the vain-glorious principle, which is here condemned.

2. Prayer. This also will be allowed to be an important duty, and one which enters into the life and essence of religion: those, who habitually neglect it, so far from being eminent Christians, are no Christians at all. Yet the bare external performance of this service does not necessarily imply any real piety. Forms and ceremonies may be punctually observed, and warmly contended for, without a sincere regard to God. Hypocrites may be exact in their attendance upon divine worship, and value themselves, because

they "make many prayers." They "draw nigh unto God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, but their heart is far from him;" and therefore "in vain they do worſhip him *." They would gladly be thought religious; and accordingly they comply with ſuch inſtitutions and rites of devotion, as are moſt likely to call them forth into public view, and procure them applauſe. Thus they may obtain the character of ſaints; and this is their grand object. But it is all, that they ſhall have. From ſuch perſons "incenſe is an abomination unto God," and their boaſted ſervices will increaſe their condemnation. This was the very caſe of the Phariſees, whom our Lord deſcribed. They were ſo ſcrupulouſly obſervant of their ſtated times of prayer, they would not omit or delay the duty, on account of any company or engagement. Nay, it ſhould ſeem, they contrived to be in places of much reſort at thoſe very ſeaſons, that the eyes of the multitude might be fixed upon them, and thus their ſanctity be remarked and celebrated.

In oppoſition to this practice, Jeſus enjoins the religion of the cloſet; not forbidding public, but commanding private, worſhip; or rather ſhewing in what manner the latter ſhould be performed. It were abſurd and impious to ſeek the notice of men, when our concern is with God alone. If poſſible, we ſhould retire from noiſe and obſervation, that we may avoid interruption, and maintain a holy converſe with the God of heaven, abſtracted from the cares and buſineſs of

* Mat. xv. 8, 9.

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the world. This communion between God and the ſoul muſt, from the nature of it, be concealed from our fellow-creatures, and may not gain us reſpect in this life. But the eye of the Lord God is upon his people, at thoſe times eſpecially, when they withdraw from human ſociety to hold fellowſhip with Him; and He will proclaim and prove to the aſſembled univerſe, for his own glory as well as their recompenſe, with what frequency and fervour they kept up their intercourſe with Him.

Does not our Lord's injunction detect the hypocriſy of many? There are thoſe among ourſelves, who, like the ancient Phariſees, with a confident and clamorous profeſſion of religion, expreſs a decided preference for thoſe ſervices which bring them into notice, and take pains to catch the eſteem and applauſe of the public. They may not ſtand to repeat their prayers in the open ſtreets, as thoſe of old; but do they not evince ſomething of the ſame diſpoſition, when they are forward to call the attention of others to the ardour of their devotions? May we not fear, that among the multitudes, who conſtantly tread the courts of the Lord, many totally neglect the duties of the cloſet? In ſuch a caſe, no ſacrifice is offered to God; but all their works are done to be "ſeen of men."

From the foregoing caution, Jeſus proceeded to give further inſtructions for the framing and preſenting of our ſolemn addreſſes to God. He has directed us to ſpeak with ſerious deliberation, and to avoid that fooliſh prolixity of expreſſions, which the heathens practiſed. All repetitions in imploring the divine bleſſing

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are not condemned; for our Lord himſelf, three times together in pouring out his ſoul before God, "ſaid the ſame words *;" and it ſeems the natural effect of a pious fervour and importunity, to urge the ſame requeſt again and again. But we are required to abſtain from thoſe repetitions only, which are unmeaning, and not to ſuppoſe that a multiplicity of words will conſtitute a good prayer, or procure us a favourable acceptance. It is neither neceſſary nor expedient to protract our devotions to a tedious length, as if we could thereby give any information to God, or produce any change in his mind. We cannot, indeed, be too earneſt, nor ought we to be weary of the ſervice. But we ſhould remember, that we come to a God, who knows all our wants and deſires, better than we can repreſent them, and who is more ready to beſtow, than we to aſk, his bleſſing.

We behold alſo an inſtance of the amazing condeſcenſion of Jeſus, in delivering to his diſciples a form of prayer, adapted to their uſe. He takes them, as it were, by the hand, leads them to the throne of grace, inſtructs them what requeſts they ſhould make, and even puts words into their mouths. The form, here preſcribed, might be deſigned as a general model, by which we may frame our petitions; but it ſeems alſo intended to be introduced among our other devotions, and offered to God, exactly as it is. Perhaps it was drawn up with a particular reference to the ſituation of his followers at that time; but with the utmoſt pro-

* Mat. xxvi. 44.

priety

priety it is ſtill continued as a ſuitable addreſs for Chriſtians in all poſſible circumſtances; ſince it is a clear and compendious repreſentation of their common deſires and neceſſities, and every expreſſion in it ſuch as they may adopt for their own.

We cannot here give it that full conſideration, which its importance demands; and therefore a few general obſervations muſt ſuffice.

The introduction or invocation teaches us to approach to God with confidence and love, as to a Father concerned for our welfare, and yet to maintain the deepeſt reverence and humility before Him, who is in heaven, and who there reigns in glorious majeſty. When our minds are thus impreſſed with ſuitable conceptions of the God, whom we worſhip, we may proceed to the petitions, which are ſix in number, the three firſt relating to the honour of God, the three latter to the neceſſities of man. We pray, therefore, that the name of God may be hallowed, that the excellency and perfections of his nature may be known throughout the world, and that every where He may be regarded with all that veneration, which is juſtly due unto Him. For this purpoſe we deſire that his kingdom of grace may be univerſally eſtabliſhed, and that the Goſpel, which is deſigned and calculated to promote it, may be ſpread abroad with increaſing energy and ſucceſs. But ſince this diſpenſation of mercy requires unfeigned obedience to God, we beg, that, as all in heaven do, ſo all on earth may, bow with entire ſubjection to Him, and that, as the Angels inceſſantly, completely, and cheerfully execute his will, ſo we, in this

this lower creation, may be enabled by his Spirit to do the same.

We are dependent, guilty, depraved, and helpless; and our petitions should be framed with a reference to this our state and character. We therefore represent the wants of our bodies, and beseech Him, who is the God of providence, and "filleth all things living with plenteousness," to supply us with whatever may be needful for our temporal support. We ask for bread, as an article of absolute necessity, not of luxury; yet that only from one day to another, and not for years to come. As we have forfeited all claims to the divine favour by sin, it is always proper to confess our demerit, and deprecate the wrath we have deserved: we are debtors to God, and liable to justice; therefore we pray, that he would cancel the black account, and no more urge his demands upon us. Here we lay hold on his promises in the new Covenant, and have recourse to him, as he is revealed through the Mediator, a God "forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." But, since it is probable, in the present state of human affairs, that we may sustain much injurious treatment from others, we solemnly declare before God our readiness to extend full forgiveness to them, and only implore his mercy, as we ourselves pardon our offending brethren. Being exposed to continual assaults, which may endanger our souls, unless God preserve us, we request that "He, who keepeth Israel," would so guide and dispose of us in his providence, that we may not be brought into circumstances of severe trial, or the formidable conflict of temptation. In order to this, we supplicate the

the divine aid, that we may be delivered from the attacks of the wicked One, who is our grand adverſary, and from every thing which is to be dreaded as a real evil in this life or another.

In the concluſion of the prayer, which is a doxology or an aſcription of praiſe to God, we acknowledge this to be the worſhip, which he deſerves, and has a right to demand. He is the univerſal Sovereign, the Almighty Potentate, the God of all perfection, the unchangeable Jehovah, from everlaſting to everlaſting. And, while we thus adore and magnify the Lord for his greatneſs and his excellency, each of theſe conſiderations will furniſh a plea, by which we may enforce our requeſts. We confirm the whole, and again expreſs our ardent wiſhes for a favourable acceptance, when we add in the cloſe, "AMEN," or, So let it be.

In the form, which Jeſus here taught his diſciples, the declaration, annexed to the petition for pardon of ſin, is of ſo much conſequence, and, as it might appear to them, ſo new and ſingular, that he ſubjoined a particular reaſon for it, obſerving, that God will receive no ſacrifice, except from the man, who is of a placable and forgiving temper. And is this the temper, with which we lift up our hands to the throne of grace? Do we poſſeſs thoſe principles and affections, which the words imply or call for? How often have we repeated the prayer without any holy, ſpiritual deſires, when we have neither felt nor underſtood the force of the language! And is this the worſhip, which we dare to offer to the heart-ſearching God? As he is not to be impoſed on, or

or ſatisfied like our fellow-creatures, with an unmeaning compliment, we may juſtly fear, leſt our pretended devotions ſhould provoke his indignation againſt us.

The ſame caution, which Jeſus gave reſpecting the two forementioned duties, is extended alſo to another inſtance.

3. Faſting. However the folly, pride, and ſuperſtition of ſome perſons may have brought the practice into diſrepute and contempt, it is clearly incumbent on thoſe, who profeſs the Chriſtian name. The diſciples of Jeſus cannot, with any propriety, decline that ſervice, for the right performance of which their Maſter has left them particular directions. We confeſs it has been abuſed: but let it not therefore be totally laid aſide. Some, poſſibly, "in will-worſhip, and" a pretended "humility," have "neglected the body *;" yet ſtill it ſhould be our care to "keep under our body, and bring it into ſubjection †," on better principles.

Here, then, as in the other caſes, we muſt beware of vain-glory, which is ever ready to infuſe its corrupt influence into our beſt actions. How prepoſterous is it, to make a parade with that which is intended to denote humiliation! We muſt, therefore, avoid all oſtentatious diſplay, which is ſo common with hypocrites; and, while with ſincerity of heart and unfeigned contrition we practiſe ſelf-denial and mortification, we ſhall not paſs unobſerved, nor faſt in vain. Men may diſregard or deſpiſe us: but God will graciouſly accept us in the Son of his love, and publicly reward

* Col. ii. 23.

† 1 Cor. ix. 27.

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what is really done unto him, though we ſhall not preſume upon any merit in ourſelves, as if we had a claim to his favour on the ground of juſtice. But to what purpoſe do we ſpeak of abſtinence? For where are thoſe, who "crucify the fleſh, with its affections and luſts?" Who among us are willing to renounce any beloved gratification? Do not moſt perſons plead for, and purſue with an inſatiable avidity, every ſenſual pleaſure and delight?

In theſe ſeveral inſtances, almſgiving, prayer, and faſting, the religion of Jeſus inſtructs us to fix our ſupreme regard upon God, as the Judge, to whom alone we are accountable, and to be perfectly unconcerned about human opinions and deciſions. It commands us to look forward to a future day, when all hypocriſy will be expoſed and deteſted, and the excellency of the true believer confeſſed and admired. How many miſtakes will then be rectified! "For that, which is highly eſteemed amongſt men," will appear to be "abomination in the ſight of God *." On the contrary, Jehovah will declare his approbation of thoſe, who faithfully diſcharged the duties of righteouſneſs in ſecret, though their names were caſt out as evil: and, to the aſtoniſhment of thoſe, who deſpiſed and hated them, he will proclaim, with high commendations, how much they have done for him, and appoint them a glorious retribution for the moſt private exertions of their charity, piety, and abſtinence.

* Luke xvi. 15.

II. We

II. We are required to beware of the love of the present world. There is no sin, against which the Saviour has delivered more or stronger cautions, than an inordinate attachment to the concerns of this life, and perhaps there is none more dangerous to the soul. It frequently lies concealed under the garb of a religious profession; for men are apt to flatter themselves, and cry "Peace, peace," if they practise no gross iniquity, approve of right doctrines, and give a regular attendance to the means of grace. Yet all this may be, while the heart remains totally alienated from God, and "goeth after covetousness." He, who is solicitous only to promote his secular interest, and consequently immersed in worldly cares, cannot possess any proper regard to God, or his own everlasting welfare. Though decent in his conduct, orthodox in his notions, constant and exact in all external forms and observances, he is just as far from heaven as the drunkard and adulterer; perhaps more so, as being less likely to apprehend his own danger.

There might be a peculiar suitableness in our Lord's address to his disciples on this subject, not only as warning them of the selfish and avaricious disposition of the Pharisees, but as giving them the expectation of suffering the loss of all things for his sake. However, it is as necessary for us at this time, as it was for them, to possess that spiritual abstraction of mind, which is here inculcated. We must turn our attention from the vain things of the present life, to the more important concerns of that which is to come.

We are forbidden to ſeek our happineſs in the world, and the reaſons are plain and forcible. Whatever we may gain on earth will be ſhort and uncertain, but the poſſeſſions of heaven are durable and far removed from every contingency. Let us beware, then, what choice we make, and what object we propoſe to ourſelves. For our affections and purſuits will be determined by the nature of that treaſure, which we deſire to attain. But, in order to decide aright on that which is moſt valuable, a clear diſcernment is abſolutely needful. How ſhall the body be directed in its movements, if the eye be ſo vitiated, that it cannot properly diſtinguiſh one thing from another? Or how ſhall the mind lead us to a juſt concluſion, whilſt it is under the influence of wrong maxims and inclinations? There is a mental darkneſs, which perverts the judgment, and produces the moſt fatal conſequences.

Is it ſuppoſed, that ſome happy expedient may be found, by which religion may be made conſiſtent with a devotedneſs to preſent gain? No; it is impoſſible: the love of God and the love of the world cannot prevail in the ſame heart. They are like two adverſe maſters, whoſe commands and expectations contradict and oppoſe each other; ſo that we cannot be ſincerely attached to their different intereſts. We ſhould, therefore, determine without delay, whom we will ſerve, and inſtantly renounce one of them.

Do any plead, "I am not enſlaved to the world; I look not for real happineſs in it, nor ſeek great things to myſelf, but am anxious only to ſecure a comfortable

ſubſiſtence?" It may be proper to remark, that our Lord's injunctions require us to lay aſide all diſtreſſing cares about the enjoyments, or even the common ſupports of life. His directions on this head equally concern the poor and the rich. For, as in each ſituation the heart may be drawn away from God to preſent objects, both are forbidden to indulge any exceſſive ſolicitude about their ſecular affairs.

We may apply the reaſons, which Jeſus has alleged. God has given you life, and he is able to maintain it. You may ſurely rely upon him for the continuance of that vital principle, which he has graciouſly beſtowed upon you; ſince he can as eaſily preſerve as create. Behold the tender care, which he exerciſeth over inferior animals! He conſtantly provides ſuſtenance for the fowls, which are of far leſs value than you. But, with all your anxiety, how little can you effect for yourſelves! You cannot lengthen out your exiſtence one moment. Or, ſhould you be diſtreſſed about procuring a ſuitable covering for your body, we refer you to the flowers of the field. The Lord God has clothed them with a gayer attire, than the moſt ſplendid monarchs can exhibit: and ſhall you be unwilling to intruſt yourſelves with him?

Beſides, this worldly ſolicitude, which may be expected to prevail in them, who know not God, is unſuitable and diſhonourable to your character, who profeſs to be his children. If God be your Father, he cannot be inattentive to your wants. Is there not, alſo, a more glorious object propoſed to you, which demands your warmeſt affections and moſt diligent

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pursuit? You cannot be too earnest in preparing for your eternal state: and if that be your first and grand concern, as it ought, every earthly care will appear comparatively small. But to secure an admission into heaven, is the best expedient for promoting your temporal interest; since God has engaged by his Covenant, to bestow all needful support in this life upon the heirs of his kingdom. You ought, indeed, to be assiduous in your application to business: for to expect your sustenance from God, whilst you neglect the appointed means of obtaining it, would be extreme presumption. But, with all your most strenuous exertions, it will become you to live in cheerful dependence on the providence of God from day to day, and not to look forward, with anxious dread, to any future events. Each returning period of time brings its difficulties: and therefore, instead of anticipating the trials of the morrow, you should diligently improve the present season, in which you may find enough both to do and to suffer.

Such is the temper of mind, which Jesus has inculcated in his sermon on the mount: and so superior to the world must all his disciples be. Yet this is an excellency, which can be attained only by the knowledge of him. For "this is the victory, that overcometh the world, even our faith *."

But how few appear to possess that divine principle! We perceive and lament the prevalence of a Pharisaical spirit among ourselves. Are not most persons hurried away by an immoderate attachment to their

* 1 John v. 4.

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gain? And do not ſome, even of thoſe who profeſs godlineſs, betray a ſordid, unbelieving, diſtracted ſtate of mind? We need not advert to the multitude of open and profligate offenders: perhaps more are deſtroyed through the fatal influence of covetouſneſs, which may conſiſt with a fair character among men, than by any other ſin whatever. Let us beware, and examine, where is our peculiar danger. Let us watch and pray, leſt our hearts be engroſſed by thoſe ſecular cares, which may, to a certain degree, be expedient and neceſſary: and, remembering how very poor is the richeſt treaſure, which can be attained in this life, let us "covet earneſtly the beſt gifts," and deſire above all things to poſſeſs "the unſearchable riches of Chriſt." Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. II.

The conclusion of our Lord's sermon on the mount, in which he gave various practical directions and exhortations.

We have already perceived much of the excellence and importance of the sermon, which Jesus delivered on the mount; and the conclusion, to which we now proceed, will appear equally interesting. We shall meet with further proofs of the holiness of that religion, which he taught, while we consider the various directions here given for the conduct of his disciples *.

To guard them against the censorious disposition of the Pharisees, who were ever prone to condemn others in the most rigorous manner, he commanded them to abstain from all rash and severe judgment. "Judge not," is indeed an extensive precept. We cannot help forming an opinion of those actions and characters, which force themselves upon our observation: nor are we forbidden, surely, to blame what is evidently wrong; nay, our duty requires us, as we love our brother, to point out his faults, and warn him of his danger. But we are enjoined not to conclude against any person precipitately, nor to be influenced in our deci-

* Mat. vii. 1, &c.

sions

ſions by pride or malevolence. Yet do we not perceive amongſt ourſelves much of this very ſpirit, which prevailed with the Phariſees of old? How few are actuated by that divine principle of love, which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things *!" Do not the various parties, who contend ſo warmly for their reſpective ſentiments and adherents, both in politics and religion, diſcover a bitter and malignant diſpoſition? How unwilling are they to believe any thing favourable of each other, or to make any candid allowance for the miſtakes or failings of their opponents! How keen in their remarks; how glad to find any thing juſtly cenſurable; and how eager to fix names of contempt and reproach, one upon the other! We need not enquire or aſſign a reaſon for this, beſides our own depravity. We need not impute bigotry and malevolence to this or that party, for they are the weeds, which ſpring up in every ſoil, and are the natural produce of the human heart. "The ſpirit that dwelleth in us luſteth to envy †."

Jeſus has ſuggeſted ſome important conſiderations, which ſhould deter us from forming any raſh judgment. Thoſe, who are moſt ſevere in their reflections upon others, need expect no favour from their fellow-creatures. Men will not be diſpoſed to pardon or palliate their miſconduct; but will greedily catch at an opportunity of requiting them with the ſame acrimonious cenſures, which they have liberally dealt out. And what treatment may they look for, at the hands of a righteous God? How will they ſtand before him,

* 1 Cor. xiii. 7. † James iv. 5.

when their characters are ſcrutinized with that rigorous exactneſs, with which they have decided upon others? He has determined, that "they ſhall have judgment without mercy, who have ſhewed no mercy *."

It ſhould alſo be conſidered, that we are but ill qualified to paſs ſentence on any perſons around us. Few of their actions, in compariſon, fall under our notice, and, perhaps, of thoſe few we ſee not the whole. We may not underſtand their inward principles; or we may conclude too haſtily from appearances, which are deceitful, or from mere reports, which are generally vague and uncertain. If, however, there be ſomething in their manners, which we muſt condemn, may not certain extenuations be admitted in their behalf? We know not, under what temptations and difficulties they have laboured, and how much they have been excluded from opportunities of information or admonition. At leaſt, a ſenſe of our own ignorance and liableneſs to err, through prejudice and miſconception, ſhould incline us to draw the moſt candid and charitable concluſions; and the remembrance of our own numerous and aggravated faults ſhould deter us from ſpeaking evil of any man.

Jeſus has inſtructed us, likewiſe, to look well to our ſpirit and conduct, when we undertake to reprove. Our office in life, and our chriſtian duty in a private ſituation, may frequently render this painful taſk neceſſary. But, while we narrowly inſpect others, we ſhould pay a ſtrict attention to ourſelves. It would be abſurd and prepoſterous to ſpy out every minute

* James ii. 13.

failing in a brother, and at the ſame time to be wilfully blind to our own enormous offences. Yet this is generally the caſe with cenſorious perſons, who are, of conſequence, incapable of paſſing fair judgment, and giving a proper admonition. Correction and reformation ſhould begin at home. For thoſe, who allow themſelves in bad habits are like men, whoſe eyes are ſo obſcured, that they cannot diſcern objects aright. And, as the ſight muſt be cleared, in order to form any juſt deciſion concerning things around us; ſo muſt the mind be freed from the love and power of ſin, that it may be qualified to determine honeſtly, and bring a true charge againſt another. " Caſt out the beam out of thine own eye; and then ſhalt thou ſee clearly to caſt out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Prudence will require us, alſo, to conſider the character of thoſe, whom we may wiſh to rebuke or exhort. For there are ſome ſuch profane and bold contemners of every thing good and ſerious, that any ſolemn admonition would not only be loſt upon them, but excite in them the moſt violent reſentment; which, beſides bringing us into difficulties, might cauſe the name and the truth of God to be blaſphemed. Therefore the Saviour adds, " Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither caſt ye your pearls before ſwine:" and on the ſame ground Solomon directs us, " Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will deſpiſe the wiſdom of thy words *."

The caution, probably, may be abuſed, and urged in defence of that cowardly-diſpoſition, which is afraid

* Prov. xxiii. 9.

of oppofing fin upon any occafion whatever. While, therefore, we plead for prudence and referve, let us endeavour to regulate our conduct, not by worldly motives, but by a fupreme defire to promote the glory of God. It may be difficult, in particular cafes, to determine the line of propriety and duty, or ftill more difficult to purfue it; on which account we fhall have need of conftant application to the God of all grace, for his guidance and affiftance. Jefus, therefore, proceeds to inculcate fervour and importunity in prayer. We feek not for an exact connection in the different parts of this difcourfe; yet exhortations to call upon God appear at once fuitably to follow from the preceding fubject.

It has been objected, however, "Though our work be arduous, our petitions to God can avail us nothing. He knows our wants, and, if he chufes, will fupply them; if not, our arguments or entreaties can never perfuade him." An impious fuggeftion indeed! Will you not be thankful, if God will difpenfe mercy to you in any way? He requires you to furround the throne of grace with inceffant cries; and, if you decline that fervice as hard or unreafonable, you will perifh for ever, for your proud contempt of his offered bleffing. He underftands, that you every day feel frefh occafion for food to eat; and, if he pleafed he could give you bread from heaven. But he has appointed the hufbandman to labour, "that he may bring forth food out of the earth;" and, though the hufbandman's utmoft efforts would, of themfelves, be ineffectual, yet, if

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for that reaſon he ſhould neglect the cultivation of his ground, he might juſtly ſtarve in the time of harveſt.

In making known our requeſts unto God, we ſhould not be ſatisfied with cold and faint wiſhes: for all the vigour, which the ſoul is capable of exerting, is required in this buſineſs. We are, therefore, commanded to "aſk, ſeek, and knock;" to "aſk," as thoſe who feel the moſt preſſing neceſſities, and cannot take a denial; to "ſeek," with unremitting diligence, as thoſe who are purſuing an object of the firſt importance; to "knock," with repeated ſolicitations for admiſſion, till the door of mercy be opened. Nor need we fear the charge of preſumption for this importunity, though our ſins have merited the ſevereſt diſpleaſure of our God. It is his own injunction, and we muſt obey. But have we a good proſpect of ſucceeding? No leſs than an abſolute certainty; for an expreſs promiſe is added, that our requeſts ſhall be granted, that the deſired effect ſhall crown our endeavours, and a free entrance into the church and kingdom of God be allowed us. But, you will ſay, do not many fail? No; not one, who has ſincerely complied with the rules preſcribed. In no inſtance whatever has the divine declaration been falſified. We ſhould form larger and more honourable conceptions of the goodneſs of God: for Jeſus has here taught us to conſider him as a tender and loving Father, who cannot ſport with the miſeries of his dear offſpring, or mock them when they cry for help. A ſtriking appeal is made to the feelings of every parent, to determine the caſe. Such a monſter is ſcarcely to be met with, as can inſult over his children

dren in diſtreſs, and, inſtead of miniſtering to their neceſſary ſupport, give them that which would be an injury rather than a benefit. And ſhall the God of heaven be leſs kind and compaſſionate than we, who are depraved and perverſe from our very birth?

But what effect ſhould the mercy of God produce in us? It ſhould render us not only fervent in prayer to him, but upright and faithful in our dealings, attentive and benevolent, one to another: nor is it poſſible, that we can feel any real devotion towards God, unleſs we have learned to exerciſe juſtice and tenderneſs to our fellow-creatures. Hence Jeſus has inferred the neceſſity of obſerving, what is uſually called, the golden rule of equity, that we ſhould treat all men, as we could with reaſon expect them to treat us in ſimilar circumſtances. This contains a perfect ſyſtem of ethics; at leaſt, from this one ſimple direction every moral duty may be deduced. It exhibits the ſubſtance of all that the law and the prophets have enjoined, concerning our relative obligations. The propriety and excellency of the precept muſt be generally allowed, ſince it calls upon every man to judge between his neighbour and himſelf. If he doubt, what line of conduct he ſhould purſue towards another, let him ſuppoſe, for a moment, a mutual change of ſituation, and then aſk, what uſage he could fairly look for from him. He cannot help drawing a right concluſion. Yet how little attention is paid to this rule! Moſt perſons ſeem to act upon contracted and ſelfiſh principles, as if they were the only people, whoſe advantage and comfort ought to be conſulted: and few indeed, comparatively, demean themſelves

ſelves in life with a real and diſintereſted integrity. We lament the diſingenuouſneſs we meet with in the world; but let us ſeriouſly examine ourſelves, and perhaps it will be found, that we practiſe the moſt awful ſelf-deluſion, and ſooth our conſciences with a falſe peace.

Religion, however, is a ſolemn buſineſs, which cannot be managed, to any good effect, with a duplicity or indifference of mind. So our Lord proceeds to admoniſh us. If we would ſave our ſouls, we muſt be in earneſt: and ſince many obſtacles may await us, our utmoſt exertions will be required. At the very onſet, much is to be done and ſuffered; we muſt "enter in at the ſtrait gate."

Two different ways are propoſed to our conſideration: and we ought to deliberate very ſeriouſly, which road we ſhould take. The firſt, which offers, ſeems to poſſeſs ſome advantages. "The gate is wide:" it is readily found; and admiſſion may be obtained without difficulty. There are no diſagreeable reſtraints to deter us, eſpecially as "the way is broad;" for every man may purſue his own courſe, and there is room enough to wander in an endleſs variety of paths. We need only follow the deſires of our hearts, and we ſhall not deviate from it. Another very powerful inducement to proceed, is, that a numerous company are travelling in this track; and, however various our taſtes, we may meet with acquaintance ſuited to our wiſhes. "Many there be, which go in thereat;" ſo that, to be faſhionable, we muſt join their ſociety.

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What hinders, then, but that here we fix our choice, ſince ſo many reaſons invite us? It may be proper to aſk another queſtion, Whither does this path tend? and the anſwer, ſurely, will fill us with diſmay, "It leadeth to deſtruction." A few fine flowers may be ſtrewed in the way to tempt unwary pilgrims; but how terrible will the end be! "Blackneſs of darkneſs for ever!" Many affect to diſbelieve it; but the mouth of the Lord hath ſpoken it, and he will execute his own denunciations. Ah! fooliſh people, and unwiſe! Sport no longer on the brink of final perdition; but inſtantly ſtop, or rather, endeavour to make good your retreat without delay.

Another road is propoſed, which is attended with ſome diſcouraging circumſtances; but let us conſider, of what ſort they are, and what influence they ſhould have. "Strait is the gate:" it requires mature thought to diſcover it, and many ſtrenuous efforts to gain admiſſion. In order to enter, we muſt conſent to certain painful ſeparations, we muſt part with many things which we might wiſh to retain, and expect violent oppoſition from our neareſt relatives and aſſociates. If there are ſuch obſtacles at the very beginning, what will be the remainder of the journey? Throughout the whole, even to the very cloſe, it is what our corrupt nature will diſlike. "The way is narrow;" ſo that we ſhall be conſtantly in danger of deviating from it. The reſtraints, alſo, which are impoſed, the various ſnares laid for the travellers, and the reſiſtance made to their progreſs, may diſcourage and diſtreſs them: for moſt perſons are unwilling to combat with difficulties.

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It may be aſked, Who are they, that walk this road? And here, perhaps, another objection will be raiſed, ſince "few there be that find it." It is not pleaſant to be marked out and derided, as preciſe and ſingular; and on this very account many will turn aſide from a path, which is ſo little frequented, and determine to be like their neighbours. Beſides, the company upon this road is not only ſmall, but of ſuch a ſort, as to diſguſt thoſe, who are devoted to worldly purſuits. For "not many wiſe men after the fleſh, not many mighty, not many noble are called *:" ſo that they who dare to "tread the narrow way," muſt be willing to be accounted of a weak underſtanding, and of a mean, contemptible ſpirit.

But will you not enquire, What will the iſſue be? And will it not at once fix your reſolution, to hear that "it leadeth unto life?" Only enter by the appointed gate, and perſevere in the path preſcribed, and you will be eternally happy with your God. It will infallibly conduct you to heaven: every one, that endureth unto the end, ſhall be put in complete and everlaſting poſſeſſion of that kingdom of bliſs and glory. Storms and tempeſts may for the preſent beat upon you, briers and thorns may obſtruct your progreſs; but hold on your way, and ſoon ſhall your pilgrimage be finiſhed, when you ſhall partake of that fulneſs of joy, and thoſe pleaſures, which are at God's right hand for evermore. Does there a doubt remain? O credit the declarations of him who cannot lie: and delay not, for a moment, a buſineſs of unſpeakable importance! Whatever pain-

* 1 Cor. i. 26.

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ful struggles it may cost, as you value the salvation of your souls, strive to gain admission at the only door, to which the Gospel refers you, before it be for ever closed.

The difficulties of the Christian may be increased by the unsoundness of some, who make a religious profession: on which account our Lord has warned us to beware of deceivers and hypocrites. False teachers, then, may be expected to arise in the Church; nor should we be staggered, when we find them. They may assume a specious appearance, and pretend to much meekness and simplicity of manners, as if they belonged to the true fold: for they "come in sheep's clothing." But their designs are base and mischievous: they are enemies to the flock of God, which it is their aim to scatter and destroy, for "inwardly they are ravening wolves." "Beware," says the great Shepherd: be cautious what credit you give to the claims and declarations of those, who put on the fair shew of piety, and undertake to instruct others.

Is there, then, any sure test, by which their sincerity may be tried? The general tenour of their conduct will furnish the most decisive proof. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." The nature of a tree is always determined by its produce. That only which yields something useful in life, is allowed to be really good: and that, which brings forth nothing but what is noxious or worthless, will not long be suffered to stand, however beautiful in appearance; "it is nigh unto cursing, and its end is to be burned *." The subject

* Heb. vi. 8.

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is applicable to thoſe who receive, as well as thoſe who give, inſtruction; and it is, therefore, incumbent upon all to enquire of themſelves, Are there any fruits of righteouſneſs to be found in me? If we have nothing more to exhibit, than the leaves and bloſſoms of a religious profeſſion, we may juſtly dread that ſentence, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

It were abſurd to attempt any impoſition upon Jeſus by an hypocritical ſhew. He requires a ſincere and uniform obedience; nor will he be ſatisfied by the ſtrongeſt declarations of high regard, where there is no intention to pleaſe him, no ſtrenuous endeavours to do his will. Expreſſions of eſteem are cheap: and are theſe all that you look for from your friends? If you perceive in them a continual neglect of your wiſhes, and an oppoſition to your known intereſt, you will not credit their words. Nay, you will account them as your enemies, who with their mouths pretend a cordial attachment, the better to carry on ſome hoſtile deſigns againſt you. Accordingly, Jeſus aſſures us, that all thoſe, who ſhall be found "workers of iniquity," ſhall be diſowned by him in the great day, and ſentenced to an everlaſting ſeparation from him, however they may be able to plead, that they have been zealous advocates for his truth, eminent officers in his Church, and poſſeſſed of diſtinguiſhed gifts for the benefit of others. How tremendous is the declaration! Can any more forcible argument be ſuggeſted, which may induce us to examine, with true ſeriouſneſs of mind, What are we? Does our conduct, as well as our language, evince an unfeigned regard to the Saviour? Or what reception

may we expect from him, when he will come to exhibit every character in its true light, and execute an impartial judgment upon all?

So solemn were the admonitions of Jesus to his hearers! The close of the sermon may be considered as a practical application of the whole, and may furnish his ministers with an excellent model for their public addresses to the people. He separated and divided his audience into two classes; and it will, in general, be proper and necessary to distinguish our congregations in the same manner.

There are those, who make a suitable improvement of their religious instructions; and they are to be encouraged by a representation of their happiness and security. They listen to the word of Christ; and, moreover, they render an unfeigned obedience. Not satisfied with expressing their approbation, they desire that their conduct in every respect should be comformable to it. They are, therefore, anxious to know, chiefly in order that they may perform, the whole will of God. Herein they act a wise part; and they shall reap the benefit. They build upon a sure foundation, which cannot be removed, and provide a place of refuge from the violence of impending storms. For such trials, probably, will soon come upon them, as will prove, that they stand on firm ground, and that their house of defence is immovably established. Is the ministry of the Gospel, then, precious unto us? and are we giving heed to the precepts, as well as to the promises? Our obedience, doubtless, is defective: but does the general practice of our lives evince our sincerity? If so, being accepted

cepted of God according to his Covenant, we ſhall be preſerved in the hour of temptation, ſupported and comforted in the pains of diſſolution; and in the ſolemn day of accounts, when the hope of the hypocrite ſhall periſh, we ſhall maintain a holy confidence and joy before the preſence of our Judge.

But there are thoſe, who conſtantly attend upon the word of God, and yet regulate not their conduct by it. It is proper to detect their hypocriſy, and, if poſſible, to diſcover them to themſelves, that they may be awakened out of the dreams of ſelf-deceit, and alarmed by a faithful repreſentation of their danger. They hear the ſayings of Chriſt; and ſo far it is well: but they do them not. The preaching may pleaſe and aſtoniſh; but it has no practical influence upon their tempers and converſation; ſo that they continue as covetous, ſenſual, and malicious as ever. How abſurdly do they act! By their religious ſervices, they ſeem to be preparing a houſe of defence; and they flatter themſelves with ſecurity. But the ſeaſon is approaching, when their folly will be expoſed. Their building will not ſtand againſt thoſe tremendous tempeſts, which may be expected to ariſe. It has no foundation, for it is not eſtabliſhed upon the rock; and therefore the ſtorms, which beat upon it, will level it with the ground, and bury them in the ruins.

And have we not occaſion to lament, as Jeſus did, that many ſeem to hear in vain? Many, who neglect not the ordinances, are remiſs in the common duties of life. We rejoice to perceive their attention at church, but grieve to obſerve no amendment at home. We

ſolemnly warn them, then, not to truſt to their profeſſions of regard to Chriſt and his Goſpel, nor to flatter themſelves, on this ground, that they have provided a place of ſafety. The tempeſtuous day is coming; and wo be to all thoſe, who have built their houſe upon the ſand! God "will lay judgment to the line, and righteouſneſs to the plummet; and the hail ſhall ſweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters ſhall overflow the hiding-place *." Horror and anguiſh inconceivable muſt enſue, when they, who "were exalted to heaven" in their religious privileges, "ſhall be thruſt down to hell" to ſuffer the vengeance of eternal fire.

Such was the import of this awful, pointed, and awakening ſermon on the mount. "The people were aſtoniſhed at his doctrine:" and, as to many, this was all the effect produced. Yet what does it avail, merely to expreſs an admiration of the ſpeaker, while the truth delivered is rejected with ſcorn? Soon will it be ſaid, "Behold, ye deſpiſers, and wonder, and periſh †." Juſtly, indeed, might the audience of Jeſus be amazed: for ſo ſingular an Inſtructor never appeared. Probably, in his manner he was remarkable, uniting a majeſtic dignity with the ſweeteſt condeſcenſion. "For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes," who meanly ſought the favour of the people. He iſſued out his commands, as poſſeſſing in himſelf the power of enforcing obedience, as their Lord, their Governor, and their Judge. Nor was the matter of his diſcourſe leſs ſurpriſing; the doctrine being in many reſpects ſublime and myſterious, contrary, at

* Iſa. xxviii. 17. † Acts xiii. 41.

leaſt,

leaſt, to the ſentiments uſually advanced by their Rabbins.

Let all the hearers of the Goſpel make the application to themſelves. It is Jeſus, who yet addreſſes you by the mouth of his ſervants, and to him your attention is demanded. What influence, then, have the truths, which are preached, produced in your minds? You may have been aſtoniſhed, but have you been truly converted by them? Remember, with whom you have to do; it is One, whom you cannot deceive. Though with demure appearance you tread his courts, if you work iniquity, he will ſearch it out, and finally reject you with contempt and abhorrence. He ſpake on earth, and much more will he ſpeak from heaven "with authority," when he ſhall come with power and great glory, as the Judge of quick and dead. "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who ſhall ſtand when he appeareth *?" There are thoſe, who will "have confidence, and not be aſhamed before him at his coming †." But there are multitudes, even in his viſible Church, who ſhall then be overwhelmed with confuſion, whilſt he will pronounce the tremendous and irreverſible ſentence, "I never knew you: depart from me."

"The Lord grant unto us, that we may find mercy of the Lord in that day!" Amen.

* Mal. iii. 2. † 1 John ii. 28.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 12.

Jeſus healed a leper—retired into the wilderneſs—attended by Phariſees and Doctors—cured a paralytic—called Matthew, the Publican—viſited him, when many Publicans were preſent—juſtified his diſciples for their free and ſocial manner of life.

In every part of our Lord's public miniſtry, we ſhall find him attended, through his different movements, by immenſe multitudes. The doctrines, which he preached, and the miracles, which he performed, generally brought together a large concourſe of people; though but few in compariſon ſeem to have been cordially attached to him. Some were led by curioſity, or a deſire to hear and to ſee any thing new and uncommon; others, oppreſſed with bodily diſeaſes, applied to him for relief under their various complaints. Shall not we, alſo, in the preſent day, be induced to liſten to the word, which he hath commanded to be publiſhed, and come to him for that healing of our infirmities, which he alone can beſtow? The Goſpel of his grace is as wonderful and important as ever: and Jeſus, who is exalted to his throne of glory, is not leſs powerful or compaſſionate, than he appeared to be dur-

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ing his abode on earth. Let us enquire, then, what are the truths, which he hath delivered to his Church; what the benefits, which his hand confers.

Among the crowds, which followed Jesus, after his sermon on the mount, was a poor unhappy man, " full of leprosy *." A malady this, which was peculiarly distressing. For, not to observe that it was most offensive, painful, and dangerous, the Jewish law excluded all persons, infected with it, from public worship, and from a free intercourse with society, forbidding them to dwell in any town. How wretched their situation! Here was one, who, being deeply impressed with a sense of his own misery, earnestly implored relief. When he saw Jesus, having heard of his character and wonderful works of mercy, he applied to him with much importunity, and with evident signs of real dependence, though, probably, not without a mixture of unbelief. He worshipped him, falling down on his face, and very ardently besought him to shew his usual compassion. Fully confident of his power, yet doubtful of his willingness, to heal him, " Lord," said he, " if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." What a picture of distress was here! An afflicted creature, deprived of the main comforts of life, shut out from friends and relations, loathsome in the sight of others, and burdensome to himself, despairing of obtaining deliverance from men, and now prostrate as an humble supplicant at the feet of Jesus! And did the Saviour ever turn away from such an object, or disregard such an application? No; his heart was ever susceptible of

* Mat. viii. 1—4. Mark i. 40—45. Luke v. 12—16.

the tendereſt pity; and, therefore, no ſooner was the deſire expreſſed, than it was granted in its full extent. Inſtantly, at his word, the malady was removed, and a perfect cure wrought. He upbraided not the leper's diſtruſt, yet took an effectual method to remove it. To demonſtrate that his grace is equal to his power, and that he is as ready as he is able to relieve every needy petitioner, he ſaid, "I will; be thou clean." Like the great Almighty Sovereign, having all things at his command, "He ſpake, and it was done."

The circumſtance, here related, repreſents the Saviour in the moſt amiable light, and holds forth encouragement to us, to make known our requeſts, whatever our neceſſities may be. Are we not, in a ſpiritual ſenſe, like this poor, afflicted perſon? Sin is the leproſy of the ſoul, which renders us unclean in every part, and unfit for the ſociety of God and his ſaints. Do we perceive and lament the defilement and the danger of this diſeaſe? Behold, a Phyſician is at hand! In every miracle of Jeſus we ſee an emblem of the works of grace, which he performs for the deliverance and ſalvation of his people. You, who are bowed down with your diſtreſs, entreat his help. You have heard what he has done for others: you believe, therefore, that he is able to ſave you; and, though your faith may be weak, and the fear may ariſe in your minds, "perhaps he is not willing," yet come and make the experiment. Lie low at his feet, and lift up your prayer to him, "Lord, make me clean;" and he will not diſdain or reject you. You ſhall prove the healing virtue of his Spirit, and obtain ſuch abundant mercy, as to your own

apprehenſions

apprehenſions may appear impoſſible. He will reply to your petition, "I will; be thou clean."

The leper, being reſtored, was diſmiſſed with a ſtrict injunction not to divulge the caſe, till he had properly atteſted it before the prieſt, and offered the appointed ſacrifices at the temple. The charge of ſecrecy might be given by our Lord, either that he might avoid all appearance of oſtentation, or that he might prevent the malicious objections of the prieſts, who, probably, would have denied the reality of the cure, if they had previouſly heard of its author: and he required a compliance with the Moſaic rites, that he might not be cenſured for contempt or diſregard of the law. But the man, who had been healed, perhaps in the tranſport of his joy and the warmth of his gratitude, publiſhed the miracle, which he was commanded to conceal. This excited the general notice of the neighbourhood; and great multitudes reſorted to Jeſus from all quarters, through the extenſive fame which he had acquired.

The admiration of a multitude, however, was not what Jeſus ſought; for he had no vain or ambitious views; and therefore "he withdrew himſelf from them into the wilderneſs." And for what purpoſe? That he might ſecure ſome ſhort ſeaſon of retirement, which he might ſpend, without interruption, in meditation and prayer. How often are we reminded, from his example, of the neceſſity of ſuch an occaſional abſtraction from the world! Be it, then, remembered, that unleſs we are ſeriouſly attentive to ſecret devotion, our religion, and our uſefulneſs too, will dwindle away. Thoſe,

who are much engaged in public life, ſhould conſider their peculiar danger on this account; for, whilſt they are always in a crowd, and diſtracted with a conſtant ſucceſſion and hurry of ſecular avocations, how can the ſoul be properly regarded, or its vigour maintained? Nay, even thoſe, who are actively employed in the immediate ſervice of God, as the miniſters of his word, may expect to ſuffer ſome ſpiritual declenſion, if they neglect the private duties of the cloſet. They ſhould not only be earneſt and unremitting in their labours for the benefit of others, but endeavour to obtain freſh ſupplies of wiſdom and ſtrength, by renewed communications of grace, for their own uſe. The difficulty is, to ſecure a ſufficient and ſuitable time. But we muſt learn of Jeſus, to watch our opportunities, and even inſiſt upon them, by retreating from our neceſſary engagements and our kindeſt friends, that we may keep up our ſecret intercourſe with God. Such is the pattern ſet before us: alas! how defective are the moſt eminent of his followers! In nothing, perhaps, do they fail more, than in the improvement of their leiſure for devotional purpoſes. For is not this holy retirement too much neglected? and neglected, becauſe it requires the moſt lively, ſpiritual affections, and flatters not the vanity of the mind, by exciting the admiration of others?

Jeſus, however, was ſoon called forth again to public view and activity. Though it might have been pleaſing to himſelf to have ſpent a longer ſeaſon in ſolitude, he could not be unmindful of the multitudes, who flocked after him, and therefore for their ſakes he returned

returned to his former exertions *. Upon his coming back to Capernaum, immenſe crowds attended him, to whom he preached the Goſpel. Amongſt theſe were ſome perſons of higher ſtation and more reſpectable appearance, than his common hearers: "Phariſees and Doctors of the law." It is but ſeldom that men of rank or conſequence pay any ſerious regard to the word of God; and therefore we may be diſpoſed to wonder that theſe made part of the congregation. But it is remarked of them, that "they were ſitting by," as if they were totally unconcerned with his ſubject, and, like ſpies, meant only to obſerve and cenſure his conduct. They had travelled from diſtant parts of the country, even from Jeruſalem, and, probably, met by appointment at Capernaum, not ſo much from curioſity, as from a malicious deſire to ſtart objections. We ſhall, therefore, remark, that they were ready to catch at his words. He was perfectly apprized of their intentions; yet, not diſcouraged by their preſence, he proceeded in his work, and gave ſuch proofs of his high character before them, by many miraculous cures, as were enough to convince or confound them.

The miniſters of Chriſt are often placed in a ſimilar ſituation, being ſurrounded by thoſe, who are unfriendly, and diſpoſed to find fault. Such hearers may properly be ſaid to be "ſitting by;" for they come, not to be inſtructed, but to paſs their judgment on the ſermon; and, therefore, they criticiſe both the preacher and his doctrine with malevolence and ſeverity. The ſervant of the Lord, however, though his feelings may

* Mat. ix. 1—8. Mark ii. 1—12. Luke v. 17—26.

be

be wounded, muſt ſtill perſiſt in the faithful diſcharge of his office, nor conceal any part of the truth, even while he knows that he ſhall excite oppoſition.

When Jeſus was thus attended, a poor diſabled paralytic was brought before him. The crowd about the houſe prevented all acceſs; but ſuch was the eagerneſs of the afflicted man and his friends to obtain relief, that with great pains and difficulty he was taken up to the roof, and let down by cords, where our Lord was preaching.

Perhaps, this particular method of application aroſe from ignorance and unbelief, as it ſeemed to imply, that the Saviour could not work the cure at a diſtance. He did not, however, upbraid them with their weakneſs; but, conſidering their conduct as an evidence of faith, he received them graciouſly, and encouraged the palſied perſon by an aſſurance of the pardon of his ſins. A bleſſing this, which does not appear to have been ſolicited or deſired. But ſo free and extenſive is the mercy of our God, that all, who apply to him with real ſincerity of heart, ſhall find him " able to do exceeding abundantly above all that they aſk or think."

The declaration of Jeſus, which denoted his ſovereign majeſty and divine power, diſpoſed his captious hearers to raiſe a formidable objection againſt him. They argued within themſelves, that he was guilty of the groſſeſt impiety in the claim, which he ſet up. Their poſition was true, that none can forgive ſins but God alone; yet their concluſion, that Jeſus had ſpoken blaſphemy, was falſe. They would not believe, though the cleareſt evidence was given, that he poſſeſſed the

perfections

perfections of Deity, and, therefore, that the forgiveness of sins belonged to him, as his high prerogative. He replied to the charge, even before they had dared to avow it, and thereby discovered his intimate acquaintance with their very thoughts. Who, then, can this be, that calleth men to account for the imagination of their hearts? To prove that he had not been guilty of a vain, presumptuous boast, he proposed instantly to restore the poor cripple before them to health and vigour; and therefore, with all the majesty and authority of a divine person, and with a view to shew his full right to pardon offenders, he thus addressed the man, "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house."

The word was effectual; for immediately the paralytic received strength, so that he departed without assistance, ascribing glory to God. This excited a general amazement and consternation among the people. They cried out, "We have seen strange things today," as if they knew not what conclusion to draw; but the proper and just inference is, that Jesus possesses divine perfections in himself, and can dispense the remission of sins, as he pleases. This must be a fair deduction, as the miracle seems to have been wrought on purpose to confirm it. And, when we hear of these astonishing events, shall we not rejoice, "that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins?" If we have no palsy to be cured, it will not be said, that we have no iniquities to be pardoned. Then let us consider our need of Jesus, and, instead of cavilling, as the Scribes and Doctors did, let us implore his help.

While

While our consciences witness against us, that our transgressions are very many, let us go to him with an humble reliance upon his mercy, and say, "Lord, thou only canst remove my load of guilt; extend thy compassion to me; assure me of thy favour; and speak peace to my soul, that I may depart with deepest impressions of gratitude and love, glorifying God."

As Jesus retired from Capernaum toward the sea-shore, he fixed his eye upon a certain publican, named Matthew or Levi, who was busily employed in his occupation, as a tax-gatherer, "sitting at the receipt of custom," and immediately called him to be his disciple *. The office of publicans was odious to the Jews, and, as their business exposed them to many temptations, they were generally persons of an infamous character; so that it became proverbial to join "publicans and sinners" together. But by our Lord's conduct we are taught to despise no man, whatever he may once have been. Jesus can pardon, and can sanctify: he disdains not to accept and save even those, who have been most atrocious offenders; nay, he seems purposely to have chosen some of this very stamp, that he might display the greatness of his mercy, and encourage the hopes of all, who are willing to submit unto him, however desperate their case may appear. In certain instances, we perceive, he has sought after them, without waiting for their application, and constrained them, by the discovery of his love and the influence of his Spirit, to forsake their beloved pursuits, and to follow him.

* Mat. ix. 9. Mark ii. 13, 14. Luke v. 27, 28.

Such,

Such, we apprehend, was the caſe of Matthew. He was immerſed in all the hurry of an advantageous though not an honourable buſineſs, and probably had no ſerious cares or ſpiritual deſires, when Jeſus looked upon him, and required him to renounce his ſecular gains, and become one of his deſpiſed attendants. Many, alſo, among ourſelves, who ſeem to have had no previous preparation of heart, no ſolemn conſideration or convictions of religion, are ſuddenly awakened in the midſt of various ſchemes of vanity and ſin. A thought is darted in upon their minds, as quick and as effectual as the word ſpoken to Matthew, in conſequence of which they immediately covet and ſeek for that acquaintance with Jeſus, which they diſdained before. The tranſition from one courſe to another is rapid; and the change, in every view, is truly wonderful. Yet, we ſee, it is eaſy for Him, who has acceſs to the conſcience, to produce it in an inſtant. The call given to Matthew, though urged by no motives or perſuaſions whatever, went with a powerful impreſſion to his heart, and ſucceeded. He "conferred not with fleſh and blood," but obeyed the ſummons without heſitation, cheerfully relinquiſhing his lucrative poſt, and entering on the ſervice of a poor and deſpiſed Maſter. "He aroſe, and left all, and followed him." From that time he was numbered among the diſciples of Jeſus, and afterwards choſen to be an Apoſtle.

Some perſons were prejudiced againſt our Lord, on account of the meanneſs, ignorance, and former immoralities of his attendants. The ſame objection is ſtill made: and many are even exaſperated, when they hear,

that thoſe, who have been profligate in their manners, or ſuſpected in their characters, diſcover an ardent zeal for religion, and commence teachers of others. But, while the pride of Phariſees quarrels with the rich and ſovereign mercy of God, " who will have mercy, on whom he will have mercy," let us admire and praiſe the love and power of our Redeemer, " who juſtifieth the ungodly," and conſtrains the moſt rebellious, not only to ſubmit, but to plead his cauſe and promote his glory Let us enquire for ourſelves, Are we the called of God in Chriſt Jeſus? It matters little, in what way, or by what particular means, this has been effected: but are we really influenced to follow the Saviour? Matthew, doubtleſs, was condemned for his conduct, as a weak or viſionary enthuſiaſt: nor need we wonder, if we come under ſuch cenſures for our attachment to Jeſus. " Let us go forth, bearing his reproach," and be ſolicitous only to approve ourſelves unto God.

Some time after this occurrence, we find the young convert entertaining his beloved Maſter at his own houſe. It may not be eaſy to fix the preciſe date of the viſit; but it may be moſt ſuitable to conſider it here, while Matthew's character is before us. Perhaps to ſhew his grateful regard to the Saviour, and to recommend him to the notice and eſteem of his former acquaintance, at leaſt to give them an opportunity of receiving benefit from his converſation, he provided a large feaſt, and invited many publicans, and others of a ſimilar ſtamp, to be preſent with Jeſus *. We admire the condeſcenſion of this exalted Gueſt, who

* Mat. ix. 10—17. Mark ii. 15—22. Luke v. 29, &c.

was

was willing to mix with any company, where there was a profpect of ufefulnefs, and who, upon the occafion now mentioned, converfed in a familiar manner with perfons of an ignominious reputation. But his conduct again called forth the enmity of the Scribes and Pharifees, who, with a pretence of fuperior fanctity, held all others in the utmoft contempt, and were angry that favourable notice fhould be taken of any befides themfelves. They feemed to infinuate, that Jefus, by a free communication with men of an infamous character, appeared as the patron of iniquity. He replied, that he did not maintain an intercourfe with them, as a partaker or encourager of their evil deeds, but from a real defire to fave their precious fouls, like an attentive phyfician vifiting his patients, to heal and reftore them. He obferved, that his bufinefs lay more properly amongft thofe, who readily acknowledged themfelves finners, than with thofe who boafted of their own righteoufnefs, and difdained the offer of a Saviour. He intimated, that, while he fhewed a regard to the moft abandoned, his object was, "to call them to repentance," and that herein he performed an act of mercy more acceptable to God, than ceremonial obfervances.

The minifters of Chrift are cenfured in the fame manner, whenever they are followed, as is frequently the cafe, by perfons who have been irregular and profligate in their conduct. It is fuggefted, if not openly afferted, that their doctrine is favourable to the purpofes of licentioufnefs, as if it allowed men to continue in their evil practices. This is faid, or hinted, by

thofe, "who truft in themfelves, that they are righteous, and defpife others." But we would admonifh them, that in fuch a temper of mind they are of all others moft oppofite to the Gofpel, and fartheft from the kingdom of heaven. "Many that are firft fhall be laft, and the laft fhall be firft." The fervant of Chrift, therefore, like his Mafter, fhould be willing to pay attention to the moft abandoned finners, in the hope of reclaiming them: and he ought to rejoice, when they accept the rich grace of that Gofpel, which the proud Pharifee fo contemptuoufly rejects.

Probably at the fame time, an objection was urged againft Jefus, for the free and focial intercourfe which his difciples maintained, fo very different from the difciples of John and of the Pharifees, who fafted often. He, however, juftified their conduct, not by denying the duty of abftinence, but by obferving, that they would foon be called to it, in a feafon of peculiar affliction, and that, during his perfonal refidence amongft them, the aufterities of fafting and mortification would be unfuitable to their fituation, as they were then rejoicing in the prefence of the heavenly Bridegroom. He had, alfo, another reafon to offer, which he illuftrated by certain fimilitudes taken from the common concerns of life. Some of thofe, whom he had attached to himfelf, had been ftrangers to that humiliation, which would afterwards be neceffary for them; and therefore, in a wife and compaffionate regard to their weaknefs, and even to their former prejudices, he would not put them upon fevere trials or duties, for which their ftrength was infufficient, but he defigned to lead them on gra-

dually,

dually, as they were able to bear it. A different treatment might have had the worst effects, producing a dislike to his service, as rigorous and intolerable.

This exhibits a pleasing representation of the manner, in which he now deals with his people. He proportions their difficulties to their ability. Many things, both in doctrine and practice, to which they would violently object upon their first conversion, are by degrees accepted, approved, and admired. When they enter on the Christian course, they are generally favoured with peculiar consolations, and know little of those burdens, by which others are oppressed. The Bridegroom is with them; and they rejoice in his presence. Indeed, he never deserts them; but as they advance in wisdom, strength, and courage, he calls them out to severer exercises; and then frequently the clear manifestations of his love are withdrawn from them, and they are weighed down with heavy afflictions and temptations. Such was the divine conduct towards the children of Israel, when they were led about through the wilderness, and not by the direct road to Canaan, and thus were gradually prepared for those sharp conflicts which they were destined to encounter *. Let us praise God for the methods of his grace, so exactly suited to the various cases of his people, and cheerfully commit ourselves to his care and disposal.

We observe, what perverseness and "contradiction of sinners" our Lord endured, and with what meekness he replied to their malicious objections. We learn, therefore, to abstain from all pride and vehemence of

* Exod. xiii. 17, 18.

ſpirit, and with patience to bear the folly and malignity of thoſe, who oppoſe themſelves. Let us beware, eſpecially, leſt we be numbered amongſt "the adverſaries of the Lord." Are there not thoſe, who ſhew the ſame cavilling temper of mind, which the Phariſees did of old? Moſt awful indeed is your ſituation. He, who ſuffered his enemies to raiſe their wicked contentions againſt himſelf, when he was upon the earth, may exerciſe much forbearance towards you; but he will ſoon reckon with you for your captious inſolence in reſiſting his Goſpel, and for your obſtinate contempt of his grace. And "can your heart endure, or can your hands be ſtrong, in the days that he ſhall deal with you?" O ſubmit; nor dare any longer to maintain the vain and preſumptuous conteſt! Refuſe not to comply with his demands; and therefore come to him, as you are required, confeſſing yourſelves on a level with Publicans, and ſaying from the heart, "God be merciful to me, a ſinner."

SECT. 13.

Jesus, celebrating the passover, cured an impotent man at Bethesda—called to account, declared his own dignity—stated the proofs of his divine mission—and subjoined the most solemn admonitions to his opposers.

It is generally supposed, that our Lord celebrated four passovers during his public ministry; and that the circumstance, which we are now about to consider, occurred at the second. At the annual celebration of that great festival, he went up to Jerusalem, as the law commanded. He was constant in his attendance upon all instituted means: and his example teaches us, not to slight or neglect the ordinances of God; since he, who could not stand in need of them, as we do, put such honour upon them.

When he came to Jerusalem, an opportunity soon offered for the exercise and display of his power and compassion *. A poor disabled man, who had remained in a state of entire impotency for thirty-eight years, lay at the pool of Bethesda, waiting in expectation of a cure from the miraculous motion of the water, which it pleased God to appoint at certain seasons, for the

* John v. 1, &c.

healing of the moſt inveterate diſeaſes. Jeſus looked with pity on this afflicted perſon, and, without receiving ſo much as a petition for relief, (the cripple, probably, not knowing the Saviour's character) inſtantly by a word reſtored his ſtrength: he commanded him, alſo, to give full and public proof of his recovery, by taking up his bed and walking.

The ſupernatural effect was manifeſt; and we might have thought the concluſion from it ſo obvious, that all muſt acknowledge it. But the ſuperſtitious Phariſees immediately objected, becauſe the work had been performed, and the man had carried away his couch, on the ſabbath day. Hypocrites, we find, are generally attentive to outward obſervances, while they are content to be deſtitute of real religion in their hearts. The perſon, who was cured, rightly argued, that he, who had ſo wonderfully removed his diſeaſe, could not be ſuppoſed to require him to do what was ſinful. They, however, probably ſuſpecting that Jeſus was the author of the miracle, were deſirous to bring him forward to public view, that they might accuſe him. But in the mean time, he had judged it proper, either through modeſty or prudence, to retire from their obſervation, before he was known. Afterwards, the man met with Jeſus in the temple, and received a ſolemn charge to take warning from his late viſitation and amend his conduct: having thus learned, to whom he owed his deliverance, he reported it to the Phariſees. This he might do, from a ſtrong impreſſion of gratitude, and an abſurd expectation that all would pay the moſt profound deference and reſpect to his gracious Benefactor.

They

They ought, doubtless, to have sought after him, given him the homage and submission, so justly due to a messenger from heaven, and considered their nation highly honoured by his presence. But, on the contrary, they persecuted him with malicious rage, as if he were unworthy to live, for an imaginary and not a real violation of the sabbath.

The circumstance, here related, may repress our wonder, when we hear the basest misrepresentations of excellent characters and the most benevolent conduct. Those, who are followers of Jesus, must expect to pass through evil report as he did, and should not be staggered in their minds, though they hazard the loss of every thing, even when they exert themselves most earnestly for the honour of God and the benefit of their fellow-creatures. "Though war should rise against them," let them "not be weary in well-doing."

For this compassionate act Jesus was called to account, probably in a public manner, and, as it should seem, before the Sanhedrim, the great council of the nation. There he stood arraigned as a criminal; and yet, when put upon his defence, he spake as the sovereign Lord of all, possessing full authority to condemn and destroy his accusers. With an inexpressible dignity he declared, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" as if he had said, "My Father is continually carrying on his works of providence, and ceaseth not on sabbath days from exercising his Almighty power for the support of the creation; and since I, likewise, maintain the same dominion, and act in the same absolute manner, I am not to be restrained and limited in

my operations by thofe rules, which muft direct the conduct of creatures." If this be, as it evidently appears, the fair import of his words, we wonder not that the Jews, who were determined to deny his divinity, confidered him as a blafphemer, in making himfelf "equal with God." This charge, therefore, they immediately urged; and he replied without fear or referve. He took occafion from it to enter upon a full vindication of himfelf, afferting the high dignity of his character and the offices he fuftained, and warning them of their danger in oppofing him. The whole of his fpeech is inconceivably fublime, efpecially if it be underftood to be addreffed to the rulers of the people, collected in their grand affembly, and fitting in judgment upon him.

Had they miftaken his words, or drawn a falfe and mifchievous conclufion from them (as they certainly did; if he be not very God), he would inftantly have corrected the error, and explained his meaning more explicitly. But, fo far from contradicting, he allowed and confirmed, their inference. For he proceeded to declare, that "what things foever the Father doeth, thefe alfo doeth the Son likewife," not only performing the fame operations, but conducting them in the fame manner, with an equal difplay of fupreme and fovereign authority. And is it not, then, a fair deduction, that the Father and the Son, who are confeffedly united in their plans of action, are one in nature, and poffefs the very fame perfections? He referred them to fome ftronger teftimonies of his Omnipotence, than had already been given by the cure of the lame man,

and

and obſerved, that in two particular inſtances his dignity, as the Son of God, would be manifeſted, to their aſtoniſhment. The one was, his reſtoring of life to the dead, according to his own pleaſure; for even now, he quickens whom he will, and at the laſt day the general reſurrection will be accompliſhed by him. The other was, the adminiſtration of the final and univerſal judgment, which is committed to him; for he it is, who will aſſign to the whole human race their different ſtates for ever, according to their reſpective characters. Are theſe ſuch works, as a creature can perform? Or, do they not evidently require the exertion of divine perfections? Jeſus, therefore, added, that in theſe acts it is the Father's grand determination to aſſert and vindicate the proper dignity of his Son; that, notwithſtanding the inſolent attacks made upon him, he commands all men to honour the Son, even as they honour the Father; and that, whatever regard is withheld from the former, is, in effect, denied to the latter. Of what ſort, then, is their religion, who are attempting the degradation of the Saviour? With all their pretences of veneration for the God of heaven, they are here expreſsly declared to be his enemies.

Accordingly, the Lord Jeſus, in the moſt ſolemn manner, demanded the attention of his judges, repreſenting himſelf as the grand ſource of all ſpiritual bleſſings, and requiring them to ſubmit to, and depend upon, him, as the author and giver of everlaſting life. To fix a deeper impreſſion on their minds, he ſet before them the awful proceedings of the laſt day, when they ſhould hear his voice, awakening them from their

graves,

graves, and ſtand at his bar, to receive their final ſentence from his mouth.

It is objected to the doctrine, which aſſerts his Deity, that he ſaid on this very occaſion, " I can of mine own ſelf do nothing;" which is thought to imply an original ſubjection and inferiority. But we apprehend, that no ſuch concluſion can be fairly drawn from his expreſſions. True it is, that " the Son can do nothing of himſelf;" that is, he can have no diſtinct plan of his own, nor act ſeparately from, or in oppoſition to, the Father: ſuch is their union, and perfect agreement together.

But does not Jeſus deſcribe himſelf as ſubordinate and dependent? Doubtleſs, there is a ſenſe, in which he is ſo. He ſpeaks of a commiſſion which he had received, and of an authority with which he was intruſted, from the Father. But this may properly be referred to his mediatorial office, and does not prove any difference or inequality, previous to his own voluntary engagement. In the function, which he has aſſumed, he ſubmits to be a ſervant, and acts by expreſs directions. " Becauſe he is the Son of man," having taken our nature, and appeared in the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh, he is, in this reſpect and for this very reaſon, inferior to the Father, and is ſent and appointed by him. Yet the character he ſuſtains, and the acts he performs, as Mediator, clearly manifeſt his Divinity; ſince they far exceed the powers of every created being in earth or heaven.

Are we, then, in danger of rendering too much honour to Jeſus, or of exalting him higher than he de-

ferves? Who does not tremble at the fuggeftion? But have we indeed obtained fuitable conceptions of his dignity? and are we habitually giving him the glory which is his due? Let us fear, left we come under the condemnation of thofe, " who honour not the Son." If we are difaffected, and unwilling to pay him profound and fupreme adoration, we are fundamentally and dangeroufly wrong. It is indifpenfably required, that, as we believe in God the Father, we fhould alfo believe in his Son Jefus Chrift.

He proceeded to ftate certain decifive proofs, in fupport of the claims, which he made. Our reafon is appealed to, in confirmation of our faith: and evidence, in abundance, may be adduced, to convince us that our holy religion is no foolifh fancy, or bafe impofition. The Gofpel does not evade, but challenges and demands, a fair enquiry. Accordingly, Jefus did not reft the matter upon his own mere affertions, which might appear fufpicious, but fhewed by a variety of arguments, that he was the very perfon, whom he declared himfelf to be.

He appealed to the teftimony of John the Baptift, who had feen the Spirit of God defcending in an open manner upon him, and heard a voice from heaven affirming his high character. To him they had once appeared to pay attention, and had fent a deputation to confult him; and yet they would not abide by his decifion.

He referred them to his own miracles, in atteftation of his divine miffion. He had performed fuch wonderful works, as no human power ever could effect: thefe,

these, therefore, sufficiently evinced, that he could not be a deceiver, but was indeed, what he had uniformly maintained, the Saviour that should come into the world.

He alleged, that his Father himself had borne witness of him: He had done it, not only by the communication of extraordinary gifts, but by an express declaration, that Jesus was his beloved Son. Such an evidence as this had not been vouchsafed on any other occasion. Yet to what purpose was it then given? Alas! it rendered many the more inexcusable for their unbelief; as they hardened their hearts against conviction.

He directed them, likewise, to the testimony of the holy scriptures. These were the writings of the old Testament, which they all acknowledged, and professed to receive with the highest regard. To these divine oracles he made a solemn appeal, in vindication of his own claims, and exposed the inconsistency of pretending reverence for the sacred records, and at the same time rejecting the Saviour, whom they all conspired to point out. The inspired authors are witnesses of Christ, either by types, promises, or prophecies; and, since Jesus has exactly fulfilled those ancient descriptions, they illustrate and confirm his declarations. How strange is it, then, that any, who have the Bible in their hands, should remain in ignorance of him! How absurd and sinful is the general inattention of men to the important contents of that book, which they allow to be a revelation from heaven!

Thus

Thus Jeſus endeavoured to convince the Jews of his character and miſſion, and of the juſtice of thoſe claims, which he advanced. And are not WE alſo intereſted in the ſubject? Do we, then, receive Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, as he is ſet forth before us? Do we unfeignedly bow to his authority, and confeſs him to be "the Lord from heaven," "God over all?" Much has been ſaid and written about the want of evidence: the ſame outcry was raiſed among the unbelieving Jews. "What ſign ſheweſt thou?" This queſtion was urged again and again, even where proofs in abundance were produced. And nothing is more common than for thoſe, who are determined not to be perſuaded, to allege, that no deciſive arguments are brought, to gain them over to the ſide of Chriſtianity. It is prepoſterous, that men ſhould make this complaint, and affect to be ready to give every teſtimony its due conſideration; when we know, that they refuſe to examine with ſerious attention; nay, that they contemptuouſly ſhut their eyes and ſtop their ears againſt every thing, which oppoſes their favourite ſcheme. We doubt not, that the grand cauſe of infidelity is inſincerity, and an extreme, inveterate depravity of heart. And ſuch reaſons as theſe do not form an excuſe for free-thinkers, but rather furniſh the grounds of their condemnation. Obſerve, then, from what ſource your objections to the Chriſtian doctrines ariſe; and fear leſt you ſhould not conduct your religious enquiries with diligence and honeſty, with meekneſs and ſolemnity. That your minds may be more deeply impreſſed with the importance of the ſubject, we beſeech you to weigh carefully the con-

clusion of our Lord's address, in which he subjoins the most pointed admonitions.

In our application to men, who are utterly careless and indifferent, we must not content ourselves with cold reasoning, but endeavour to alarm their consciences; or else the strongest arguments will fail of their effect. Thus Jesus, upon the occasion before us, attempted to rouse his hearers, and to work upon their hearts, by a plain and faithful representation of the nature, malignity, and danger, of their sin. As it is probable, that some persons of a similar character and disposition may cast their eyes upon these pages, we would earnestly entreat their serious regard to the considerations here suggested.

He warned and reproved his opposers, because they acted in contempt of his unparalleled kindness, and most gracious offers of salvation; when their own final perdition must be the consequence.. He declared, that he courted not their favour through ambitious views, and that their destruction would be entirely owing to their obstinate refusal of submission to him. His knowledge of their very thoughts and motives enabled him to detect their hypocrisy; and therefore he observed, that their treatment of him fully proved, notwithstanding their professions of regard to God, that their hearts were not under the influence of divine love. That principle would have led them to receive him, who addressed them in his Father's name, and sought nothing but his Father's glory. So likewise will all our pretences, either to devotion or morality, be found vain and insincere, if we neglect the great Saviour of the world.

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He condemned them for their anxiety to procure respect and empty titles of honour from their fellow-creatures, while they felt no real concern about the favour and approbation of God; declaring, that, in such a state of mind, they could not exercise any proper reliance upon him, as the Redeemer. How solemn is the thought! The faith of Jesus cannot consist with ambition, or a foolish fondness for human applause. Those, therefore, whose grand desire and aim is to be admired and advanced among men, are at once excluded from the number of his true disciples. He requires us to take up our cross and to follow him through contempt and tribulation. Such as are unwilling to do this, understand not his worth, or their own necessities; and, of consequence, they cannot believe in his name.

He warned them, finally, that Moses, the great founder of their own religion, to whom they professed an unreserved submission, appeared as their accuser before God; and that, as they would be fully convicted on the charge of rejecting that prophet, there would be no need to bring any further testimony against them. They were condemned on their own principles. Moses had written much concerning the Redeemer, and represented his office, work, and character, by various rites and ceremonies: a real regard, therefore, to those ancient records would have produced a cordial reception of Jesus, in whom the types and prophecies were fulfilled. Yet such was their astonishing ignorance and perverseness, that, with the Bible in their hands, they denied and persecuted the very person, of whom they were continually reading.

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The addreſs is applicable to others beſides Jews; to many among ourſelves, who pretend to pay the higheſt deference both to the old and the new Teſtament, as the revelation of God. May we not aſk, Do not theſe ſcriptures contain the heavieſt charge againſt you, while you oppoſe the authority of Chriſt, and deſpiſe his grace? And ſhould you not, to be conſiſtent, either totally reject the book of inſpiration, or elſe change your own principles and practice? The ſin of unbelief is generally thought of little conſequence; for it is preſumed, that men will not be finally condemned for mere opinions. But, from the repreſentation here given, does it not appear, that it includes the moſt complicated guilt? It is not barely an error of the judgment, but betrays an extreme depravity of heart. It is not a ſingle offence; for it is always accompanied with other baſe principles, and infallibly leads to every ſpecies of ill conduct.

Unhappy they, on whom this ſin is chargeable! who treat the Saviour, and his offers of mercy, with contempt! O conſider, how wretched is the ſtate of your minds, while you diſcover the utmoſt diſdain for infinite excellence, and repay the tendereſt love with hatred! Your wickedneſs is of a heinous nature, and highly aggravated. You deſpiſe "the Lord of glory," the Son of God, "who thought it no robbery to be equal with God." You pay no regard to the united teſtimonies of earth and heaven in his favour. You ſcorn the kindeſt and richeſt offers, ever made to man. You are unwilling to bow to him, whom even Angels worſhip, or to be indebted to him for the life of your ſouls, when,

when, alas! without him they must inevitably perish. You set light by his unparalleled condescensions and labours of love, and, in defiance of all admonitions and threatenings, are rushing on, with steady course, to certain and everlasting damnation.

It is proper, by these repeated warnings, to call your attention to your own perilous condition. But how little effect is produced by such solemn reproofs! Probably after our Lord's address, his accusers and judges were silenced, and restrained by an awful impression upon their minds from proceeding to any act of violence against him. So possibly may you, who are his avowed opposers, for a season at least, be convinced and alarmed by these faithful representations of your guilt and danger. You may seem to relinquish your objections, and yet persevere in unbelief, and be destroyed for ever. Most tremendous thought! May it please God, not only to awaken your fears, but to subdue the enmity of your hearts! Then you will not cease to pray, "O Lord, fulfil in us all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power!"

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 14.

Jesus replied to the objections of the Pharisees against his disciples for plucking the ears of corn, and vindicated himself for healing the withered hand, on the sabbath day—performed various cures—spent a whole night in prayer—chose twelve Apostles—and repeated certain passages of his sermon on the mount.

The history of Jesus exhibits the highest excellence of character, labouring under the most malignant misrepresentations, contempt, and opposition. His life was one continued series of actions, denoting fervent zeal for God, and pure benevolence to men. We might have thought, that such exalted goodness could not meet with enemies, or would soon disarm their malice. But it was otherwise; and the fact incontestably proves the extreme depravity of human nature. While this depravity remains, a conduct, like that of Jesus, will always excite disgust. Let it, however, be our only care to tread in the steps of our Lord and Saviour, regardless of all temporal inconveniences which may follow. A wicked world may hate and defame the truly religious; but He, whom they serve, will soon

plead their caufe, and even now, " wifdom is juftified of her children *."

Various objections were urged againft Jefus; for he was furrounded by perverfe and malevolent perfons, who watched him with clofe attention, and fought occafions to accufe and reproach him. Very frequently, therefore, he had to ftand upon the defenfive, and reply to the petulant cavils of his adverfaries. A common fubject of complaint was, that he did not pay a proper regard to the fabbath; becaufe he ceafed not from acts of kindnefs and mercy on that day. The proud and fuperftitious Pharifees, who placed all their religion in external obfervances, endeavoured to reprefent him as a profane defpifer of divine inftitutions; yet the cafe was, that he neglected no ordinance of God, but did not conform to their fanciful and traditional explanations of the law.

His difciples accompanied him on his return from Jerufalem, foon after the paffover, and, as they walked through the fields, finding the calls of hunger, they began to pluck the ears of the corn, which grew about their path †. The dictates of neceffity, however, were no apology to the infidious attention and watchful malice of their enemies. It happened to be the fabbath; and immediately the objection was ready, " Behold, they do that which is not lawful to do upon the fabbath day." The thing itfelf was exprefly allowed ‡; but the particular time, and perhaps fome concomitant cir-

* Mat. xi 19.

† Mat. xii. 1—8. Mark ii. 23—28. Luke vi. 1—5.

‡ Deut. xxiii. 25.

cumſtances, of the action gave the offence. It might be, that the very rubbing of the ears of corn was re-preſented as a kind of labour, unſuitable to that ſacred ſeaſon.

Our Lord, who will maintain the cauſe of his people againſt their accuſers, replied to the charge, and vindicated the conduct of his diſciples by the example of David. That holy man, in a caſe of preſſing neceſſity, took the ſhew-bread out of the houſe of God on the ſabbath, for the ſupport of himſelf and his attendants; an action, which in any other ſituation would have been highly ſinful. To ſave life is more pleaſing to God than the obſervance of any merely poſitive inſtitutions; for, as Jeſus argued, our gracious God has declared, that "He will have mercy and not ſacrifice *;" that is, when they interfere with each other, the former muſt have the preference, and the latter be diſpenſed with. From this part of the defence we are led to remark and admire the faithful and zealous attachment of his followers, who cheerfully expoſed themſelves to hunger, that they might wait upon him, and enjoy the benefit of his divine inſtructions. We are not aware, how many and extreme difficulties they endured; and, probably, we ſhould not have known their diſtreſs on this occaſion, had it not been requiſite to offer an excuſe for them. But where do we now perceive ſuch a regard to Jeſus, as diſpoſes men to ſuffer in his ſervice? In general, many withdraw upon the firſt appearance of hardſhips, and "walk no more with him." Like birds

* Hoſ. vi. 6.

of

of paſſage, they abide not the winter, but depart, when ſtorms approach.

Our Lord alleged, likewiſe, that, as the prieſts were allowed to perform certain laborious offices on the ſabbath, in their attendance upon God, ſo his diſciples might be permitted to do that, which was neceſſary to enable them to wait upon Him. To make this reaſon good, he aſſerted his own ſovereign authority, declaring, that "the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath-day." The important truth demands our ſerious conſideration. The appointment itſelf, of one day in ſeven to be dedicated to holy purpoſes, is derived from the Lord Chriſt. He inſtituted it at the creation, when he reſted from all his works; He renewed it at the delivery of the law from mount Sinai; and He, who ordained, has a right to ſuſpend, to modify, or alter it, as he pleaſes. It was, therefore, a ſufficient vindication of his followers, in the circumſtances now mentioned, that they acted in his ſervice and by his permiſſion.

It becomes us, alſo, to regard "the Son of man" as "the Lord of the Sabbath." In this view, we ſhould obſerve that ſacred ſeaſon out of obedience to his command, and ſeek the enjoyment of his preſence and favour, as its grand object. We believe it to have been agreeable to his will, if not by his expreſs directions, that a change ſhould be introduced, and that the firſt, inſtead of the laſt, day of the week ſhould be kept holy to Him. This is now diſtinguiſhed by a new and more honourable name, "the Lord's day:" He claims it as his own, in a peculiar manner, and has laid us

under fresh and greater obligations to sanctify it, by rising from the dead, and blessing his Church with the miraculous effusions of his Spirit, on that very day. In this alteration it is not implied, that the sabbath itself is abrogated, or that any thing is taken away, essential to the original institution, which prescribes such a portion of our time to be set apart for God. But rather, according to this representation, if Jesus be " the Lord of the sabbath," the appointment is confirmed, and its continuance among Christians ordained by him.

Soon after the incident last mentioned, we find him combating the same or similar objections. " On another sabbath," probably in some city of Galilee, he attended the public worship of God at the synagogue, as his custom was; and there also he took the opportunity of teaching the people *. Here again we are instructed to be thankful, that we have a house of prayer, to which we can resort, and that divine ordinances are administered among ourselves, much more valuable than those, which Jesus frequented. But how are we followers of Him, if our place be generally vacant, if by our absence we shew, that we care not for the sacred service?

In the midst of the congregation sat a poor man, whose right hand was withered, and, therefore, utterly disabled for labour. From the known benevolence of Jesus, and his former miraculous cures, the Pharisees expected that he would heal the cripple, and narrowly observed him for that very purpose, that they might charge him with a direct profanation of the sabbath.

* Mat. xii. 9—21. Mark iii. 1—12. Luke vi. 6—11.

He was aware of the perverſe reaſonings and malicious intentions of their hearts, which they had not expreſſed; yet he was not diſcouraged. He therefore called forth the man, whom he had beheld with compaſſionate regard; and then they aſked with ſome ſubtlety, that they might enſnare him by the queſtion, whether it would not be a violation of the holy reſt, to perform any cures on that day. He replied, however, that all exertions of real mercy were perfectly allowable, and that they muſt be ſtrangely inconſiſtent, to extend relief, as they commonly did on their ſabbaths, even to their ſheep in danger or diſtreſs, and yet obſtinately refuſe it to one of their own ſpecies. This was not all; He knew, that they entertained a ſecret deſign of murdering him, while they objected to his works of kindneſs. Accordingly, by a ſolemn appeal to their conſciences, he detected their hypocriſy, and confounded their malevolent purpoſes. He called upon them to ſay, whether it was more ſuitable to the object of that ſacred ſeaſon, "to do good or to do evil, to ſave life or to deſtroy it:" and inſtantly they were convicted and ſilenced. He felt a holy indignation and grief, on account of the obduracy of their hearts: and, looking round about upon them all, that he might command their attention, he ſpake the word with an inexpreſſible majeſty, and the cure was performed.

Did they not, then, relinquiſh their oppoſition to him, when they ſaw ſuch an inconteſtable proof of his divine power? Did they not all acknowledge, "Thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God?" Ah! the deſperate wickedneſs of man! We can ſcarcely con-

ceive greater depravity, than that which is here exhibited: they departed in a rage, and immediately consulted together, how they might destroy him. Being apprized of his danger, he retired to the sea of Galilee: and there, not discouraged by the designs of his enemies, he continued to prosecute his important work. Immense multitudes from various and distant parts of Judea followed him; and many amongst them, oppressed with divers diseases, experienced the virtue of his healing hand. But to avoid all appearance of ostentation, and that he might not still further incense his opposers, he took particular pains to prevent the accounts from being dispersed abroad. Thus, by his kind attention to the weak and distressed, and his gentle, unassuming deportment, he fulfilled the prophetical description of his character, given by Isaiah *, and proved himself to be the very Saviour, that should come.

We may learn prudence and modesty from our great exemplar; and he will instruct us, also, to persevere in well-doing, whoever may set themselves to resist, or form malevolent intentions against us. But let us fear the awful state and condemnation of his adversaries. How vain and detestable are their schemes! Their best concerted plans will be baffled, and themselves covered with their own confusion. Yet, we apprehend, disaffection to Christ prevails among ourselves, as certainly as it did with the Pharisees of old: and it is requisite for us all to enquire, if we are not, in one respect or another, actuated by a similar spirit. What, then, will the issue be? What can you expect, in prosecuting a

* Isa xlii. 1—4.

contest

conteſt againſt Him, who has all power in his hands? O " kiſs the Son, leſt he be angry, and ye periſh from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little *!"

It ſhould ſeem, that, even in our own times, ſome unfair and miſchievous concluſions have been drawn from our Lord's conduct upon the ſabbath, and his vindication of himſelf. Many, clearly, think themſelves authorized to purſue their worldly projects of buſineſs and pleaſure. But is there any thing, in what he has ſaid or done, to countenance ſuch a practice? Do we perceive in him any contempt of the ſacred day? Or can we infer more from his example, than this, that works of piety, charity, and neceſſity may be attended to? We aſk, then, Are theſe the only calls, which you regard on the ſeaſon, ſet apart for holy reſt? Have you not taken pains to explain away all obligations to a ſtrict and ſerious obſervance of the ſabbath; as if, at leaſt, the Goſpel had ſo far releaſed you from them, that every man is now at liberty to proſecute his own plans, as he is led by intereſt or convenience, by faſhion or inclination? You may inveigh againſt ſuperſtition; but are you not, in this way, pleading for profaneneſs? We are aware, that infidels are deſirous to throw down that ſtrong barrier of religion, the ſanctification of every ſeventh day: this being effected, there is nothing to prevent the floods of impiety and wickedneſs from overflowing and deſolating the world. Should we not, then, on our part, make a bold ſtand againſt every ſuch attack, and maintain the important duty of devoting to the Lord, without abatement, that

* Pſal. ii. 12.

portion of our time, which he requires? And can we help lamenting, that ſo many, who profeſs to be followers of Jeſus, habitually neglect and ſhamefully violate the duty? We ſee them deſerting the houſe and miniſtry of God, ready to join in every ſcheme of idleneſs, vanity, and diſſipation, or elſe ſo engroſſed with ſecular cares, that their thoughts and affections cannot be raiſed to any higher objects; and yet they wiſh to be complimented as good Chriſtians. How ſtrange and grievous an inconſiſtency is this!

The ſame ardent zeal, for the glory of God and the ſalvation of men, continued to actuate the Saviour through each part of his life. Intending to appoint certain perſons, out of his conſtant attendants, to the Apoſtleſhip, he previouſly retired for ſecret prayer to a mountain, where probably an oratory was erected *, that he might engage the divine bleſſing upon the inſtitution: and ſo fervent was his devotion, that he remained all night in the ſame ſpiritual exerciſe †. A whole night ſpent in importunate ſupplications to God! Ah! at how great a diſtance do we ſtand from this eminent example! Would not a ſingle hour, ſo employed, ſeem a wearineſs to us? Yet ſurely we muſt allow the propriety and neceſſity of conſecrating ſome portions of our time to the ſame pious purpoſe. Eſpecially, when our minds are fixed upon any important ſcheme or undertaking, a more than common length of holy retirement, and an unuſual earneſtneſs in prayer, will be requiſite, that we may proceed with right prin-

* Prid. Connect. vol. iv. p. 557.
† Mark iii. 13—19. Luke vi. 12—49.

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ciples, and prevail with our God to assist and prosper us. And can there be a business of greater moment, than the ordination of persons for the sacred ministry?

After such a preparation, very early in the morning Jesus called together his disciples, or stated followers, who by their previous acquaintance with him had been in some measure trained up for the service; and out of them he chose "whom he would:" as Lord of his own kingdom, he appointed twelve, who were to act like chief officers or principal ministers under him. These he named APOSTLES, that is, messengers, intending, after further instructions, to send them forth with full powers and credentials, to declare his will and publish his Gospel throughout the world. He might, probably, fix upon this exact number, from its answering to the number of the tribes of Israel, that, as the Jewish church was derived from the twelve sons of Jacob, so the Christian might be founded and established by means of twelve persons, as the heads and fathers of it. We rejoice and give thanks for the benefit of their labours, which extends even to us. For through them the salvation of God has been made known to distant lands and successive generations; and the truth of their doctrine is confirmed with a strength of evidence, which no assaults of our adversaries can shake.

The office of the Apostleship was extraordinary, and therefore not designed to be perpetual; but there is a general and constant necessity for the common functions of the ministry, which, accordingly, will be continued to the end of time. Let prayer be made without ceasing unto Christ, who himself directs all the affairs

of

of his ſpiritual government, that he would raiſe up and ordain faithful paſtors and teachers, and ſupport and proſper them, for the converſion of ſinners, and the edifying of his ſaints. If He give the word, great will be the company of preachers; and thoſe, who go forth at his call, and by his appointment, may be expected to labour to good effect. It ſeems eſpecially requiſite for them to be previouſly acquainted with Jeſus, and furniſhed with their inſtructions from him, that they may be able to ſay, as he did, "We ſpeak that we do know, and teſtify that we have ſeen." Yet even ſuch perſons, who are properly inveſted with the ſacred character, ſtand in need of the conſtant interceſſions of the Church, that, by the divine bleſſing, they may "both ſave themſelves, and thoſe that hear them."

When the Apoſtles had received their commiſſion, Jeſus came down with them into the plain; and he was immediately ſurrounded, as uſual, with vaſt multitudes imploring relief. At his command their various diſeaſes were expelled, and the cauſes of their diſtreſs removed. So freely and extenſively did he manifeſt his power and compaſſion, that none ſolicited his help in vain; "for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all." We wonder not, that thoſe, who are oppreſſed with affliction, ſupplicate deliverance. In general, men feel an acute ſenſe of their bodily wants, and importunately beſeech others to aſſiſt them. But ſin hath induced a dreadful ſtupor upon our ſouls; in conſequence of which few perceive or lament their ſpiritual neceſſities, or conſent to apply for that remedy,

which

which Jesus alone can bestow. O flock around him, you, who are bowed down with a conviction of your guilt and depravity, and who know, from your own painful experience, that you " are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!" Come, and he will supply all your need. Let your faith bring you to him; and the influence of his grace shall work effectually in you, to cure your spiritual maladies (for virtue still goes out of him), and you shall be able to bear witness of his mighty energy, even as the multitudes, who were now around him.

Nor were the doctrines of Jesus less salutary than his miracles. When he descended from the mountain with the Apostles, whom he had lately chosen, and a numerous assembly of other persons resorted to him, he took the opportunity of delivering the most important instructions and exhortations both to his particular attendants and to the people at large. His address upon this occasion contains a repetition of certain remarkable passages of the sermon, which he had preached some months before, probably in a distant place, and to a different audience. As that sermon has been already considered, it may be sufficient briefly to suggest the principal topics, on which our Lord insisted at this time; not as if they were of small moment, but because they have so lately engaged our serious meditation.

With a view to encourage his true disciples, and perhaps those more especially whom he had just appointed to the sacred function, " he lifted up his eyes on them," as if rejoicing over them, and expressing for them his peculiar affection. He then described their character,

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their exalted privileges and happineſs, notwithſtanding all they might ſuffer, and, with the language of authority as well as love, pronounced them bleſſed. This is perfectly applicable to his ſincere followers in every age. They are "poor," it may be in worldly things, as they certainly are "in ſpirit;" but they are the favoured ſubjects of Chriſt's kingdom, and heaven, with all its bliſs and glory, ſhall be their inheritance. They may ſuffer the extremity of want, ſo as to be deſtitute of food, for the ſake of the Goſpel, after the bleſſings of which they "hunger," more than for their neceſſary ſupport; but they ſhall be ſupplied with every thing truly good, and ſatisfied with all ſpiritual enjoyments. They may endure much diſtreſs upon earth, oppreſſed with penitential ſorrow, no leſs than with the calamities of life; but the time of their deliverance and exultation is at hand. They may be treated with hatred and contempt, and ſeparated from the ſociety of their neareſt friends; but on this very account they ought to rejoice and triumph, becauſe the Lord God hath put an honour upon them, and will diſtinguiſh them with marks of peculiar regard, at the reſurrection of the juſt.

But, turning to others of an oppoſite character, he deſcribed their awful caſe, and denounced the moſt tremendous woes againſt them. Let thoſe, in the preſent day, who are deſtitute of true religion, hear their doom declared, and fear for themſelves. They perceive not their need of any ſpiritual bleſſings, nor feel any ardent deſires to obtain the grace revealed in the Goſpel. Whatever temporal advantages, therefore, or ſenſual pleaſures they may now enjoy, they are wretched; ſince they

they "have neither part nor lot in this matter." Poſſibly, they may abound in wealth, and be able to command every gratification, which a carnal heart may covet; they may live in ſplendour, gaiety, and diſſipation; they may be admired and applauded amongſt men; but the day of their calamity is coming; for their expiring breath will conclude all their comfort and their glory, nor can any thing await them beyond the grave, except tribulation and anguiſh, ſhame and everlaſting contempt.

After ſuch alarming declarations, Jeſus proceeded to deliver various precepts, which prove the peculiar holineſs of his religion, and are of general uſe to all his profeſſed diſciples, for the regulation of their tempers and conduct.

He enjoined the exerciſe of forgiveneſs and love towards the moſt violent and malignant perſecutors; together with the practice of univerſal and diſintereſted benevolence. But to return kindneſs for injuries, bleſſings for curſes; how oppoſite is it to the pride, envy, anger, and reſentment of our fallen nature! To do good, without the proſpect of preſent recompenſe or advantage, and without exception of perſons, how contrary to the ſelfiſh, contracted notions of men! Yet only by ſuch enlarged beneficence can we prove ourſelves to be partakers of the grace of Chriſt, and the children of the Higheſt, who extends his benefits to all.

He gave cautions about judging and reproving others. There are caſes, in which it may be proper and neceſſary to undertake that unpleaſant office; but

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we ſhould be ſure, that the occaſion demands it, and that we do it not raſhly or ſeverely, or from an arrogant, cenſorious, or malicious diſpoſition. Upon this head, our Lord intimated the danger of following "blind guides;" and, as we are generally much influenced by our teachers, we ſhould beware leſt we attach ourſelves to thoſe, who do not feel or underſtand the mild and liberal ſpirit of Chriſtianity. Yet, while we look to others, we ſhould not forget ourſelves, but rather begin the work of reformation there. For except we perceive, condemn, and correct our own faults, we are incompetent to decide upon the characters and conduct of others.

He enforced the neceſſity of proving a profeſſed regard to him by a holy life. As the fruit determines the nature of a tree, ſo the habitual tendency of our actions, words, and tempers will beſt diſcover the ſtate of our hearts towards him. By ſuch marks, then, we muſt examine, whether we are truly united to Chriſt, and renewed by his grace. To what purpoſe ſhall we make a ſhew of high reſpect for him, while we live in an uniform courſe of diſobedience? How ſtriking his reproof, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I ſay?" Such compliments he conſiders as the groſſeſt inſult; yet how generally has that inſult been put upon him! Not a few in every age have pretended the moſt ardent affection, and have been forward to give him every proper title and expreſſion of honour, who have not ſubmitted to his authority. Let us beware of this fatal deluſion.

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He represented the difference between the sincere believer and the unsound professor of the Gospel. They differ most widely from each other, both in their present practice and in their final condition. The sincere believer comes to Christ, receives with an humble mind the doctrines of grace, and by an exemplary life proves, that the word, which he has heard, has produced its right influence upon him. His trust is built on an immovable basis: "the rock of ages" is the sure foundation, on which he rests. Trials and temptations, like heavy storms, may beat upon him; but nothing shall be able to overthrow his hope, or disappoint his expectation. The hypocrite may listen to, and perhaps zealously contend for, the pure system of the Gospel; but he advances no farther. He depends on his accurate notions and distinctions, or his compliance with the forms and ceremonies of religion, while he feels not its inward energy.. He will, therefore, be left defenceless and unsupported in the day of his calamity: "the overflowing shower" of divine indignation shall suddenly cast him down, and sweep him away into everlasting destruction.

Such were the solemn admonitions of the Saviour. They have been offered to our notice before; but surely we may bear the repetition of them again and again. They are at all times interesting, seasonable, and necessary. May they lead us to a strict and impartial examination of our own hearts! What, then, is our character? what our expectation beyond the grave? If we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus, what is the regard we pay him? Do we give him any thing more than a

bare compliment? Or are our affections and general habits regulated by an unfeigned obedience to his will? What benefit do we derive from hearing the Gospel? Or what fruits of righteousness do we produce? These important enquiries naturally arise from the subject before us; and they claim our most serious consideration. Let us examine the foundation on which our edifice rests, since we are building for eternity. How terrible will be the confusion of the ungodly, when "the hail shall sweep away their refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow their hiding-place *!" But may we, "being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ," stand fast in the faith, against every assault on earth, and then appear at the last awful day with confidence and exceeding joy, through the merits and mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Amen.

* Isa. xxviii. 17.

SECT. 15.

Jesus healed a Centurion's servant—raised a widow's son to life—testified of John the Baptist—lamented over the impenitent—encouraged the contrite—dined with a Pharisee, and vindicated the woman, who stood as a mourning penitent at his feet.

AMONGST the various incidents, which meet us in the life of Jesus, none will be found of a trifling or uninteresting nature. Every thing in this history is extraordinary, and replete with instruction. Each step that we advance will furnish us with fresh proofs of his divine character and mission, and at the same time with renewed instances of his condescending and compassionate regard to our miserable and guilty race. May every view of him constrain us to cry out, with admiration and gratitude, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us *!"

After the solemn address, which Jesus delivered to his disciples in the audience of the people, he retired to Capernaum, his most usual residence †. Wherever he

* Luke i. 68, 69. † Mat. viii. 5—13. Luke vii. 1—10.

went, opportunities of exerting his benevolence were offered, and these he readily embraced. In this city, a man of good reputation, who, it should seem, attended the worship of the true God, a Centurion, or a Captain in the Roman army, having heard of Jesus, of his character, and the miracles he had wrought, applied to him, to come and heal a favourite servant at the point of death. The Gentile soldier discovered a remarkable degree of humility and faith. Thinking himself unworthy to solicit the kind notice of so exalted a Personage, he prevailed on some of the principal Jews in the place, to present and second his petition. Jesus, who was ever inclined to succour the afflicted, immediately consented to comply with their request. But the Centurion, ashamed to give him the trouble, and conceiving it to be an unsuitable thing, that he, a sinner and a Gentile, should receive such a visitant in his house, believing also that Jesus was able to perform the cure at a distance, sent another deputation of his friends, and then at last went forth himself to meet him, entreating him to proceed no farther, but only by his powerful word to command the health of the servant to be restored. "Even I," said he, "who am subject to the authority of another, yet as I have soldiers under my control, no sooner issue out my orders, than they are executed." More was implied than expressed; and the inference intended could be no other than this, "How much rather will every injunction of thine be instantly obeyed, since all creatures are subservient to thy will! No remoteness of place can be any obstacle to prevent the desired cure, if Thou shalt so ordain."

This was a signal instance of faith, in a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel. It was such, that our Lord declared his admiration, being superior to what he had yet found among the Jews themselves. And hence he took occasion to warn them, who boasted of their descent from Abraham, that many from the most distant parts of the earth, even of Gentile extraction, should obtain a distinguished rank in the kingdom of glory, whilst those, who presumed upon their exclusive right to it, should be condemned to a state of everlasting torment and despair. This conveys a suitable admonition to us. We observe, that there is no situation or condition of life, however unfavourable, in which the grace of God may not produce eminent instances of real religion. And it should excite our thankfulness, to meet with any one, under great disadvantages of education and in the midst of many snares, like this officer in the Roman army, humbled with a deep conviction of extreme unworthiness, and entertaining high and honourable thoughts of Jesus. He did not stoop too low, when he said, "Lord, I am not worthy, that thou shouldst come under my roof;" for the most exalted monarch in the world might properly adopt the same confession. And shall not we remember and acknowledge, that we deserve no tokens of the Saviour's kind regard, and that, if He deign to visit us, it must be ascribed to his own wonderful condescension and mercy? But do we possess the faith of the Centurion? Or, do we not, rather, distrust the power of Christ? We are favoured, not above the Gentiles only, but even more than the ancient Jews; so that we may be

called "the children of the kingdom." Yet have we not occasion to fear, that many, who are destitute of our privileges, may rise up in judgment to condemn us? And would it not aggravate our misery, to see them admitted into heaven, whilst we ourselves are excluded for ever?

The request of the Centurion was granted, and his confidence in Jesus proved to be well founded. He was dismissed in peace, and his servant instantly restored to the full vigour of health, merely by the efficacious word of the great Physician. Nor will any be finally disappointed of their hope in Him. We should entertain large expectations, from a persuasion of his ability to save; and by a strong, unshaken faith in him, we shall infallibly secure his blessing to our souls.

After this miracle, it is probable that the fame of Jesus was celebrated still farther, and that, in consequence, the number of his followers increased. The multitude, indeed, so pressed upon him, that he had no leisure to take proper refreshment: and so incessant was his attention to them, that his friends interfered, blaming him for an excess of zeal, and with much vehemence importuning him to desist from his labours, as injurious to himself, and even denoting a degree of insanity *. Peculiar occasions may justify and demand such ardent exertions, as to some may appear needless and extravagant. Nay, the very fervency, which at all times becomes the servant of Christ, will be accounted by the world a sure mark of weakness or derangement of the faculties. But, compared with the vigorous

* Mark iii. 20, 21.

efforts

efforts of the Saviour, the moſt eager and ſtrenuous endeavours of his people will ſeem to ſavour of lukewarmneſs and ſloth. Indeed, we are not capable of activity, like His.

He might ſo far yield to the ſolicitations of his friends, as to receive ſome nouriſhment, and then retire for the night; but the next day he returned to his work again *. He took a journey of ſeveral miles, to the city Naín, accompanied by many attendants; and there a freſh opportunity offered, for the diſplay of his high character. As he approached the place, a moſt affecting ſpectacle was preſented. He met the ſolemn proceſſion of a funeral: a diſtreſſed mother, who had been before bereaved of her huſband, was now following her only ſon, her chief ſupport and comfort, to the grave. As a man, our Lord felt the tendereſt compaſſion for the afflicted widow, and, without any requeſt from her or from others, interpoſed on the mournful occaſion, to wipe away her tears. But what conſolation could he adminiſter to one, who ſeemed to have loſt her all? "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" He ſhewed himſelf ſtronger than death; for inſtantly, with divine majeſty and authority, as the Almighty Lord, "who quickeneth whom he will," he ſpake the word, and the dead revived. He reſtored to the diſconſolate woman her beloved child, in all the vigour of life; and thus "gave unto her, beauty for aſhes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praiſe for the ſpirit of heavineſs."

* Luke vii. 11—17.

What an aſtoniſhing exhibition both of mercy and of might! We are at a loſs to know, which of them we ſhould moſt admire. No wonder, that an event ſo uncommon, and inconteſtably miraculous, impreſſed the minds of all the ſpectators with a ſerious awe, and conſtrained them to acknowledge, that an illuſtrious prophet had riſen up among them, and that God had again viſited his people. And ſhall not we, alſo, be ſtruck with holy fear and reverence of the Saviour, while we contemplate his actions? Does not the occurrence before us clearly prove his divine miſſion? Why, then, do not all receive him, as coming from heaven to inſtruct and redeem his Church? Alas! but few are convinced; or, their convictions are very ſuperficial. Many will not examine the evidence with ſerious attention, but, in proud or careleſs contempt, turn away both their eyes and their ears from the truth. Others, we obſerve with grief, though obliged by the ſtrength of argument to aſſent to the Goſpel, yet fail of that unfeigned and ſupreme regard, which is due to Jeſus. They may feel an impreſſion of terror upon their minds, like the inhabitants of Nain, and confeſs, that "a great Prophet is riſen up," while they refuſe to ſubmit or liſten to the doctrines, which he delivers. How ſtrange and fatal an inconſiſtency is this!

We have ſeen the tenderneſs of Jeſus towards the poor widow: ſurely, we ſhall learn from the example, to look upon the afflicted with kindneſs and compaſſion, and ſtretch out our hands for their relief. But feeble, in compariſon, is our pity; for, in many caſes, our en-

deavours

deavours to remove or mitigate diſtreſs are ineffectual. Jeſus alone can adminiſter ſuitable and adequate aſſiſtance. O fix your attention upon Him, you that are overwhelmed with trouble, whoſe "tears have been your meat day and night!" He can inſtantly turn your weeping into joy, and your complaints into loud thankſgivings, by accompliſhing deliverance in a way, which to you may ſeem impoſſible. For what cannot his power effect? Or what will not his love be diſpoſed to grant, if really expedient for you? Death, indeed, may rob you of thoſe, who were the delight of your eyes, and the deſire of your hearts, and the grave may detain them; yet, under the preſſure of this calamity, you are taught to rejoice in Jeſus, as "the Reſurrection and the Life," who will ſhortly break up the manſions of the dead, and reſtore to you every dear friend, who has departed in the faith, clothed with glory and immortality, to rejoice with you in his bliſsful preſence for ever.

The report of our Lord's miracles, which was diſſeminated far and wide, was carried by the diſciples of John to their honoured Maſter, then in priſon *. For their conviction, we ſuppoſe, rather than his own, the Baptiſt took that opportunity of ſending them with an expreſs meſſage to Jeſus, enquiring, whether he were the very Meſſiah or not. In reply to their queſtion, He condeſcended to give them the moſt ſatisfactory evidence, which might diſperſe every doubt, and, probably, induce them to attach themſelves to Him, after John's deceaſe. They beheld the wonderful exertions

* Mat. xi. 2, &c. Luke vii. 18—35.

of

of his power and mercy: for in their presence, while they stood before him, he healed all manner of infirmities, cast out devils, and restored sight to the blind. He referred them, therefore, to his works for a decisive proof of his character, and directed them to carry a faithful relation to John, of what they had seen and heard, that they might all perceive the ancient prophecies, concerning the Saviour of the world, to be fulfilled in him. At the same time he added, that it would be happy for them, if they should not be staggered in their minds, or influenced by the prevailing prejudices and objections against him. It is of importance to ourselves also, to be assured that Jesus is no deceiver, that he exhibited the strongest testimonies of his own divine mission, and, therefore, that our faith rests on a sure foundation. Yet many reject him: and it is allowed, that there are such things relating to Him, his doctrines, and adherents, as may give offence to superficial and captious observers, and such as proud and sensual minds can never relish. In this view, blessed indeed are they, who have themselves escaped or surmounted these difficulties, and who are not led away by the exceptions of others.

Our Lord took occasion from the visit of John's disciples, to address the multitude concerning the Baptist, who had once been extremely popular among them. He spake of him in the most honourable terms, as being stedfast both in his preaching and practice, not easily shaken like a reed with the wind, not seeking the pomps of the world or sensual gratifications, but as a man of singular austerity and self-denial. He declared

him

him to be superior, in some respects, to all the ancient prophets, especially as being the Harbinger of Messiah, and preparing the way for his reception. He remarked the peculiar ardour, to which some had been excited by his ministry, who seemed as if they would gain an admission into the heavenly kingdom by a holy violence; and yet he lamented the awful condition of those, who rejected both the Baptist and the Saviour, whom he came to introduce. He was led, therefore, to complain of the perverseness of that generation, who had discovered the most absurd prejudices against them, and who condemned the one and the other, though for different and opposite reasons; so that there appeared no prospect of obtaining any acceptance with them. They had refused their attention to John, on account of his austerities, as if he were a melancholy, distracted man, under the possession of an evil spirit: and now they calumniated Jesus, for the freedom of his intercourse with men of all characters, as if he were himself addicted to intemperance, and a patron of the dissolute and abandoned. Yet the Saviour rejoiced, that, amidst these various misrepresentations, there were those, who perceived and approved the wisdom of their conduct.

The application to ourselves is obvious. Many, in our own day, betray a frowardness and malignity of temper, similar to that of the ancient Pharisees. They are ever ready to take exceptions to the people and the ways of God, and that too, on contrary grounds. The ministers of Christ, endued with different talents and dispositions, address them, sometimes with one mode of exhortation, and sometimes with another; being solicitous

licitous to recommend the Goſpel to their favourable regard, by every method they can deviſe. But every method proves equally unſucceſsful: for now they are thought too rigid and moroſe, and again they are condemned for allowing too great a latitude of conduct. It were, therefore, vain for them, with the utmoſt prudence and circumſpection, to expect to gain general eſteem, or avoid reproach. Happy they, who are earneſtly concerned to ſave their own ſouls, and are preſſing, with a holy violence, into the kingdom of heaven! They perceive the propriety and neceſſity of many things in religion, with which others are diſguſted: and, inſtead of being carried away with the torrent of general prejudice, they determine to adhere to the truth and ſervice of God, however viliſied in the moſt opprobrious terms.

On the occaſion juſt mentioned, Jeſus was induced to ſpeak more largely, and with peculiar ardour of affection, while he lamented over the impenitent cities of Galilee, in which he had performed moſt of his mighty works. The meek and compaſſionate Saviour denounced one wo upon another, againſt Chorazin, Bethſaida, and Capernaum, and predicted the final and aggravated ruin, which was coming upon them for their obduracy and contempt of the Goſpel. Many, it ſhould ſeem, of reſpectable character and abilities, remained in unbelief. This very circumſtance has been thought an objection to the Chriſtian faith. But ſurely, in this view, it appears that it was not a mere human ſyſtem, or indebted to worldly policy for its ſupport. The ways of God are in the deep: but we perceive it to be

His

His purpose to abase the pride, and stain the glory, of man; and, when we observe, that his salvation is hid from many of high attainments in literature, whilst it is revealed to some of inferior parts and mean rank in life, we are constrained to be silent in the dust, or rather, with the Saviour, to adore the sovereignty of the awful dispensation.

At the same time, however, to encourage those humble penitents, who, under a conviction of their guilt, might be ready to fear, that the condemnation, he had denounced, would fall upon them, he represented his own supreme authority and divine perfections, commensurate to those of the Father, and then declared his peculiar tenderness and grace to such, as might be bowed down with a sense of their sin and misery. He published the most kind and general invitation to all, who felt a burdened conscience and sought deliverance, adding express and absolute assurances of pardon, peace, and salvation, on their unfeigned application and cordial submission to him.

We ask, then, What conceptions do you form of Jesus; what regard do you shew him? Do objections arise in your minds, and prevent your cordial belief of the Gospel? But after such proofs, as have been adduced, who shall complain of the want of evidence? Have you no apprehensions of the tremendous consequences of rejecting him? Shall Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum be condemned with accumulated woes for their infidelity, and you escape unpunished? Or, do you consider yourselves as utterly excluded from his notice, and incapable of receiving mercy, on account of

of your extreme depravity and long continuance in ſin? He ſpeaks expreſsly to your caſe, and gives you direction and encouragement, ſuited to your diſtreſs. O keep not at a diſtance from Him, while He ſays, "Come unto me!" He will not diſdain you, nor withhold his bleſſings from you. "He is meek, and lowly in heart;" and, therefore, will condeſcend to your requeſt, mean and worthleſs as you are. Only, be willing, as teachable ſcholars, to take your inſtructions from him, and, as obedient ſervants, to fulfil his injunctions: you will not complain of the rigour of his demands, but experience them to be eaſy and delightful, and "find reſt unto your ſouls."

Is it enquired, What was the conſequence of our Lord's ſolemn addreſſes? Some might be deeply and properly affected, and others ſo much impreſſed, as to be induced to ſhew him an outward reſpect, without any cordial attachment. One perſon of this latter deſcription, whoſe name was Simon, a Phariſee, invited him to dine at his houſe; and Jeſus, who was an example of civility and kindneſs, and who ſought opportunities of doing good in all places and among all characters, readily complied *. During his viſit there, a ſingular circumſtance occurred, which ſhewed the ignorance and pride of the Phariſee, and the amazing grace and compaſſion of the Saviour. A woman in the town, who had been a notorious ſinner, and, as it is ſuppoſed, infamous for her lewdneſs, heard where he was; and, probably, emboldened by his aſſurances of mercy and peace to the mourning penitent, deſired to

* Luke vii. 36—50.

give

give ſome teſtimony of her ſtrong regard for him, and for that purpoſe prepared certain coſtly perfumes, with which ſhe might anoint him. She was admitted into his preſence, while he was at dinner; and ſtanding behind him, as he lay reclined upon the couch, ſhe betrayed marks of extreme diſtreſs. The cauſe of it, evidently, was unfeigned contrition for her ſins. She wept; and her tears were ſo abundant, that the drops flowed down upon and bedewed the Saviour's feet. Perceiving where they fell, ſhe ſtooped, and wiped them off with her diſhevelled hair. Nor was this all: ſhe could not refrain, even before the company, from expreſſions of ardent gratitude and love: ſhe kiſſed his feet, and poured her rich ointment upon them, unmindful of its proper uſe, or not preſuming to apply it to his head.

Theſe ſigns of her fervent affection our Lord did not diſdain, but received them favourably. The Phariſee, however, who looked on her with contempt, took offence. Lifted up with a proud conceit of his own goodneſs, he conſidered the very touch of the woman as carrying defilement, and concluded that a prophet of God muſt not only know the baſeneſs of her character, but inſtantly turn away from her with diſguſt. This diſpoſition is not uncommon. Thoſe, who have high thoughts of themſelves, ſet up a kind of claim to the divine regard, and cannot bear, that ſuch, as have been notorious offenders, ſhould be admitted to a ſhare in that regard, or that any encouragement ſhould be given to them, even when transformed and eſtabliſhed "in newneſs of life." But how large is the grace, how great

great the condeſcenſion of Jeſus! He did not ſcorn the poor, weeping penitent, though ſhe had been moſt abandoned, and long enſlaved in the ſervice of Satan; but he received, he comforted, he defended her, at the hazard of his own reputation.

He replied, in a very appoſite parable, to the ſecret objections of the Phariſees (for they had not been openly avowed), ſhewing, that of two debtors, both of whom are inſolvent, and both freely releaſed from their obligations by their generous creditor, he, to whom the largeſt forgiveneſs is extended, will feel the warmeſt gratitude. He then referred immediately to the caſe of Simon and the woman, reproving him for the neglect of thoſe tokens of reſpect, which are uſually paid to welcome viſitants, and commending her for the expreſſions of her regard, however extravagant they might ſeem. The Phariſee thought his own offences few and trivial, and, therefore, could not entertain any high value for the Saviour; but ſhe, who was overwhelmed with a deep ſenſe of her aggravated guilt, and yet cheered with the hope of a full and gratuitous pardon, was ſolicitous to declare, in every way ſhe could, the ardour of her affection towards Him, who had obtained the mercy for her. "Wherefore," ſaid Jeſus, "her ſins, which are many, are forgiven: for ſhe loved much." We do not believe, that her ſtrong attachment to Chriſt procured her remiſſion, but, rather, that it was its fruit and evidence. It would invert the order of things, and of God's diſpenſations with his people, to ſuppoſe, that this attachment preceded her acceptance; but it afforded a ſtriking proof of it, and

manifestly arose from a conviction of her vast obligations. Not, therefore, as if she were then first received to favour, but to establish her the more in thankfulness, hope, and joy, he solemnly pronounced her absolution: "Thy sins are forgiven." That very circumstance occasioned fresh offence among those, who were present; for they had no just conceptions of the person and authority of Jesus. But, in order to declare his divine character most peremptorily, and to assert his high prerogative, however they might cavil, he repeated the assurance of her pardon and salvation, through faith in his name, and dismissed her in peace.

A serious attention to this little narrative may suggest the following enquiries, which will furnish an useful improvement of the subject.

Are not we debtors to God, according to the description of the parable? Have not we failed of that obedience, which He has a right to demand? Is not our debt large, immense, beyond calculation: Let us beware of the ignorance and presumption of the Pharisee. Though others may seem to owe far more, will this procure our discharge? Or are there any, among the most atrocious offenders, whom we may disdain? Does it not, rather, become us to confess, that our own transgressions are innumerable, and, considering how we have violated the strongest obligations to God, that none can need forgiveness more?

Are not we, likewise, insolvent? Or, in what manner shall we contrive to answer all the claims, which the Lord God has upon us? What payment can we tender? Is it such, as will be sufficient to satisfy his just

demands? It is said, perhaps, "We shall repent, and do better." But shall we ever perform more than would have been due from us, if we had not sinned? And, if we only prevent an increase of the debt in future, can this have any effect in diminishing what is already contracted, or wipe off any part of the old account against us? What, then, shall we resolve on? Let us not waste the time, in forming vain and fruitless schemes of our own, but frankly acknowledge our inability, and go with deepest humiliation to that Jesus, who "receiveth sinners." Let each of us cry to Him, "O Lord, undertake for me:" He will appear as our "Surety," and present us with a full and free discharge. If, like this penitent woman, we mourn and weep at his feet, he will observe our tears, commiserate our distress, and hasten to comfort us with the assurance, that "our sins, which are many, are forgiven."

If, then, he pronounce us to be acquitted, what should hinder, but that we depart in peace? This is his own gracious proposal, and ought not to be refused. Yet do not many reject the consolation, and indulge an excess of sorrow? Doubtless, there is continual cause to abhor ourselves, and lament our folly; but to grieve as if there were no hope, is to despise the mercy provided. Jesus, the compassionate Redeemer, stands ready to wipe away our tears, and bids us "Be of good cheer." Let us only, without reserve, submit to him, and depend upon him; and then we may "go on our way rejoicing."

Finally, What affections do we feel towards Jesus? Surely, the warmest expressions of thankfulness and zeal

are

are highly ſuitable and becoming in thoſe, who have obtained ſuch free and extenſive forgiveneſs. Where Jeſus is diſregarded, we can aſſign the real cauſe: the malignity of ſin is not underſtood, the greatneſs of the debt incurred is not at all apprehended, and it is ſuppoſed, that there is but little, if any, need of remiſſion. Do WE, therefore, ſhew any certain ſigns of ſincere and ardent love to our heavenly Benefactor? Do we ſeek his preſence, and delight to be in the houſe, where Jeſus is? Do we mourn before him; and are we willing to be at expenſe for his ſake? We cannot, indeed, make any adequate compenſation; but do not we wiſh to teſtify the ſenſe, which we feel, of our immenſe obligations to him?—" O Lord, come, and ſhed abroad thy love in our hearts by the Holy Ghoſt, that we may hereby be conſtrained to dedicate ourſelves, our ſouls and bodies, to be a reaſonable, holy, and lively ſacrifice unto Thee, who haſt loved us, and given thyſelf for us!" Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 16.

Jesus took another circuit—healed a demoniac—vindicated that miracle, against the objections of the Pharisees—admonished and reproved them—and encouraged his faithful adherents.

THE grand luminary, which visited the earth in the person of Jesus Christ, diffused its unequalled splendour through a large extent. Happy indeed would have been the men of that generation, if they had been sensible of their inestimable privilege, in having such an Inhabitant, such a Teacher amongst them. He brought with him "good tidings of great joy to all people," and he laboured to disseminate the knowledge of them far and wide. He took one circuit after another, in the land of Judea, publishing salvation wherever he went, and among all ranks and characters. Not seeking the friendship of the great, or any sensual enjoyments, but, ever intent upon his work, he removed from city to city, with considerable pain and fatigue to himself, for the benefit of others, that he might give them an opportunity of being instructed in the Gospel of his grace *.

* Luke viii. 1—3.

Where are they, who copy after this illustrious pattern? Though we are not called to travel in the same manner, we ought to possess the same spirit, and be willing to sacrifice our ease to usefulness. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." So shall "this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus *." A similar benevolence may be displayed even by persons of moderate abilities and private situations. According to our talents and occasions, we should lay ourselves out for the glory of God and the best interests of our fellow-creatures. Hereby we shall evince our acquaintance and union with him, whose name we bear, while "we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."

Many, who resorted to him, soon withdrew from his company, having no relish for his conversation. But he had some stated attendants, throughout his various movements, who were almost inseparably attached to him. "The twelve were with him." These he selected, as his chosen witnesses, that they might be instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, confirmed in their regard, and fitted for their apostolic function. Certain pious women, also, who had been healed of their infirmities and converted by his grace, occasionally, at least, waited on him, and "ministered unto him of their substance." What condescension, to receive such assistance! He became very poor indeed. Though "the earth is his, and the fulness thereof," so mean and destitute was his condition here, that he subsisted

* Phil ii. 4, 5.

upon the charity of others. Shall we admire their liberality, in contributing to his ſupport? Or rather, ſhall we not envy them the honour of being permitted to do ſo? "It is more bleſſed to give, than to receive *." And may not this bleſſedneſs be our's? Though we cannot miniſter unto Jeſus, in his perſon, we may in his repreſentatives, in his diſtreſſed members. For what is beſtowed upon them, he will conſider as beſtowed upon himſelf. And, if we "ſhut up our bowels of compaſſion from them, how dwelleth the love of God in us †?"

Thus attended, then, Jeſus took another circuit, in which we ſhall meet with ſome remarkable occurrences. In the courſe of his progreſs, a poor unhappy man, under the poſſeſſion of the Devil, ſo grievouſly afflicted as to be deprived both of his ſight and ſpeech, was brought to him, and obtained immediate relief ‡. According to his cuſtom, he paid a gracious regard to the application, by expelling the evil ſpirit, and reſtoring the demoniac to the perfect exerciſe of his faculties. And what effect did the miracle produce? The common people were ſtruck with aſtoniſhment, and ready to draw the concluſion, that Jeſus muſt be the promiſed Meſſiah. But were not theſe perſons ignorant, and liable to be impoſed on? That they were unlettered, it is allowed; yet that circumſtance was no diſadvantage to them in the preſent caſe: they were as capable of judging of plain facts, as the acuteſt Philoſophers. The Scribes and Phariſees, conceited of their wiſdom, like

* Acts xx. 35. † 1 John iii. 17.
‡ Mat xii. 22—32. Mark iii. 22—30. Luke xi. 14—23.

most

most pretenders to ſcience, poſſeſſed more pride, and therefore more prejudice, than the multitude: and thus, whatever evidence the Saviour exhibited, they conſtantly urged one objection or another, and would not be convinced. How malignant and impious a diſpoſition did they diſcover, in the inſtance before us! They ſuſpected, if they did not avow their ſentiments, that Jeſus performed the miracle by the aſſiſtance of Satan, and really acted in confederacy with the prince of darkneſs, to promote his intereſt in the world. How infamous and abſurd the inference! Was there any ground in his life, his doctrines, or his works, to accuſe him as an agent or accomplice of the Devil? No: very far otherwiſe indeed. But it is not uncommon for men, who hate the Goſpel, to give a credit and importance to ſuch inſinuations againſt it, as appear, upon the very face of them, ridiculous and falſe.

This circumſtance, however, rendered the character of Jeſus the more illuſtrious; for it produced freſh proofs of his meekneſs and wiſdom. His followers, alſo, ſhould remember, that, while they preſerve a proper temper under malicious calumnies and reproaches, they afford ſuch an evidence of their ſincerity, and the excellency of their principles, as muſt eventually turn to the confuſion of their enemies. Our Lord ſpoke in his own vindication; but his defence went rather to convince, or, at leaſt, to ſilence, his adverſaries, than to juſtify himſelf. "It is a very ſmall thing, that we ſhould be judged of man's judgment;" and therefore, if we be ever ſo much traduced (and it is not poſſible that we can be more ſo than the Saviour), let us not

be ſolicitous, on our own account merely, to obviate the charges, which envy or malevolence may bring againſt us. Yet there may be reaſons, which render it expedient to reply.

Jeſus ſhewed that he was privy to their thoughts, for he ſpoke to their ſecret ſurmiſes, while he proved their objections to be moſt fooliſh and profane. He argued, that Satan would never oppoſe his own intereſt, or diſpoſſeſs himſelf; for ſuch a conduct would infallibly weaken, and even deſtroy, his kingdom amongſt men: and on the ſame ground we maintain, that, the Goſpel, which contains a ſyſtem of religion, manifeſtly ſubverſive of the Devil's influence in the world, muſt be from heaven. He alleged, that, as they believed ſome of their own diſciples to caſt out demons by the Spirit of God, they ought not to aſcribe his miracles to any other cauſe. On their own principles, he convicted them of the moſt partial and unjuſt judgment, in not allowing thoſe diſpoſſeſſions, which he had effected, to proceed from the Holy Ghoſt, as well as thoſe, which were accompanied by the exorciſms of their own adherents. He then contended, that, granting a divine agency in what he had performed, they muſt alſo admit, that he was come to ſet up the kingdom of God among them; and, therefore, inſtead of fooliſhly and maliciouſly cavilling at him, they ought with profound humility to ſolicit a place in that kingdom. The fact was, that Satan, who had long maintained an undiſturbed dominion, was now in various inſtances deprived of his influence. His authority was, ſo far, deſtroyed; many of thoſe, whom he had held in cruel bondage,

being

being rescued out of his hands by the superior and irresistible power of Jesus. The inference, then, was clear and decisive, that he, who "destroyed the works of the Devil," could not be his confederate.

Our Lord proceeded to warn them, that it was impossible for them to observe a neutrality in the contest, which he had instituted against the prince of darkness, and that all were required to declare themselves either on one side or the other. The same warfare is still carried on, and it holds good to this present day, "He that is not with him is against him; and he that gathereth not with him, scattereth abroad." He commands us, in the most explicit manner, to espouse his cause with cordiality, and support it with vigour. On which side, then, do we stand? Here are two Leaders, of opposite interests, never to be reconciled: and it is indispensably requisite, that every man shew himself, decidedly and actively, for the one and against the other. Have we entered into the service of Jesus? Are we "with him;" sincerely, without dissimulation; uniformly, without wavering; and universally, without reserve? This he demands. Yet how many are satisfied, merely because they do not set themselves in an avowed resistance against Christ and his measures! You, who do not oppose the Gospel or its professors, may boast of your candour and liberality; and, as you are not open enemies, may presume upon being accounted his friends. But you are most unhappily deluded. Your indifference about his cause, he considers as a marked contempt of him; and therefore he thanks you not for abstaining from hostilities; but, while you refuse to ex-

ert yourſelves for him, he looks upon you as being in the intereſt of his grand opponent.

Jeſus, perceiving in theſe proud and malevolent cavillers a confirmed hatred of him, warned them ſtill further of their danger in daring to aſcribe to Satan's agency, what had been effected only by the divine Spirit. He declared, that, while the Goſpel offers a full and free forgiveneſs of "all manner of ſin and blaſphemy," one offence is excepted, and that "the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men."

This is a moſt tremendous aſſertion indeed! It ſhould excite a holy fear and circumſpection in us all. We ought to beware, that we do not even approach to the ſin; much leſs ſhould we imitate the profane effrontery of thoſe, who deny or ridicule the operations of the Holy Ghoſt. It is far better to keep at a diſtance, than to underſtand exactly its particular nature and preciſe limits. But it may be proper to enquire, of what kind the offence is, of which ſuch awful things are ſpoken. Many painful apprehenſions are entertained by perſons of a tender conſcience, as if they had certainly committed it, and therefore, by the divine decree, were abſolutely and for ever excluded from mercy. But ſo far, perhaps, we may confidently affirm, that thoſe, who are moſt oppreſſed with the dread, are leaſt in danger of having contracted the enormous guilt.

From a compariſon of the different paſſages in the ſacred ſcriptures, where the ſin is mentioned *, it appears to be an entire rejection of the Goſpel. And

* Heb. vi. 4—6. x. 26—29. 1 John v, 16.

ſince

ſince there is no other remedy for our fallen ſtate, who ſhall dare to complain, whatever be their puniſhment, after their own deliberate refuſal of ſalvation? Yet this is not all: it is an avowed and continued oppoſition to the grace of Chriſt. The Phariſees, to whom our Lord ſpoke, perſecuted and calumniated him, as acting under the direction of Satan. Shall we ſay, then, that decided enmity againſt him is, of itſelf, unpardonable? Many, who have made long and furious reſiſtance to him, have found mercy. Saint Paul himſelf had once been "a blaſphemer and a perſecutor;" and it is probable, that ſome, who had "crucified the Lord of glory," were redeemed to God by the very blood which they ſhed. But they ſinned ignorantly. The offence, here ſpecified, is committed againſt ſtrong evidence and conviction of the truth. One miracle upon another had been wrought in the ſight of thoſe very people, who ſtill perſiſted in reviling our Lord; and probably they acted in repugnance to the full perſuaſion of their own minds. Yet it is ſuppoſed by ſome, that Jeſus referred, not to the caſe of thoſe preſumptuous oppoſers, but of ſuch as ſhould witneſs the extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt upon the Apoſtles, and ſhould then aſcribe his operations to the influence of Satan, rejecting the Goſpel as a baſe and impious fraud. Certain it is, that the perſons liable to this condemnation are thoſe, who have received the cleareſt information, the moſt deciſive teſtimony, and deepeſt impreſſions of religion upon their hearts; and yet, in defiance of all, put away from them the ſalvation of God, with a blaſ-

phemous

phemous contempt. Such is the deſcription given of the unpardonable apoſtate. It ſhould ſtill be remarked, that "backſliding," though attended with circumſtances of peculiar aggravation, may obtain forgiveneſs with God, and that then only, we may fear, it is the black offence, to which remiſſion is denied, when it involves in it a malicious and confirmed oppoſition to the truth. For it ſhould carefully be noted, that it is never followed by contrition or godly ſorrow, but always accompanied with an unrelenting obduracy of mind. The apoſtate, whoſe caſe is deſperate, cannot be "renewed unto repentance." Thoſe, therefore, who feel a tenderneſs of conſcience, and a real compunction of heart for the guilt they have contracted, and who ſeek deliverance by the blood of Jeſus, afford the ſtrongeſt evidence, that the ſin, here ſpoken of, is not chargeable to their account, however they may be oppreſſed by the painful apprehenſion. After all, any other wilful tranſgreſſion againſt God, if perſevered in, will be fatal and damnable to the ſoul; and yet, in every inſtance, forgiveneſs is in this life promiſed and granted to the humble and believing penitent.

But why, it may be aſked, was this ſevere admonition addreſſed to the Phariſees? Had they caſt off all regard to religion? No: but their profeſſions were hypocritical, as their words and actions clearly proved. Jeſus, therefore, exhorted them to a conſiſtency of conduct, either in one way or another, by giving up themſelves to God ſincerely and without reſerve, or elſe by throwing off their pretences to piety, and appearing openly

openly and avowedly wicked; that ſo the fruit might accord with the nature of the tree *. They had uttered blaſphemous expreſſions, from which he proceeded to convict them of their guilt and danger. He affirmed, that they had ſpoken agreeably to their inward diſpoſitions, and that the ſource of all fooliſh and profane converſation lies in a depraved and unconverted heart. Leſt this ſhould be made light of, as if words alone, being no more than a mere breath of air, were of little conſequence, he warned them, that God would ſoon call them to judgment, not only for their daring and impious aſſertions, but for all their vain and idle talk, and that their common diſcourſe would be adduced as an evidence of the ſtate of their minds, either to their acquittal or condemnation.

And do theſe things concern none but the ancient Phariſees? Shall not WE alſo be tried for the words of our lips, and our eternal doom be aſſigned according to the atteſtation which they ſhall deliver? Yet who conſiders the tendency of his converſation, or endeavours ſo to order it, that he may not be aſhamed to "give account thereof in the day of judgment?" If "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth ſpeaketh," how ſhall we ſtand the teſt; or what will our prevailing tempers and paſſions appear to have been? Do not the mouths of many among us utter blaſphemy; and others delight in expreſſions of lewdneſs, ſlander, and reviling? Where are thoſe, who conform to the apoſtolic rule? "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the

* Mat. xii. 33, &c. Mark iii. 31, &c. Luke xi. 24—36.

use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers *." Is the discourse of the most eminent believers as spiritual and heavenly, as might be expected from their high character? O let us pray, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips; and let my words be acceptable in thy sight †!"

Did the solemn warning, then, convince or silence the Pharisees? No: they perceived that he claimed a dignity, which they were unwilling to acknowledge; and therefore they complained of the want of evidence, and demanded some further sign, desiring, perhaps, a visible display of his divine glory, or an appearance from heaven, which should carry absolute demonstration with it. How preposterous was this! Shall proud and obdurate sinners prescribe to God, by what particular kind or degree of testimony he shall confirm his own revelations to them? Jesus, therefore, declared that no other sort of attestation should be granted till his own resurrection, which, he foretold, would happen on the third day from his death, agreeably to its typical resemblance in Jonah's miraculous deliverance. He reproved them for their obstinate impenitence and unbelief; he threatened them with the most aggravated punishment. The Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but they had despised a greater prophet. He referred them, also, to the queen of Sheba, who had travelled from a remote country, with much pains and expense, that she might profit by the wisdom of Solomon, while they had shewn the utmost

* Eph. iv. 29. † Psal. xix. 14. cxli. 3.

contempt and hatred of him, who was far superior to Solomon; and he warned them that her example would condemn their perverseness.

Are we satisfied with the proofs, brought in favour of the Gospel? Nothing, indeed, but a proud or sensual disposition will lead us to deny to their sufficiency. Many in our own day, like the unbelievers of old, call for additional and stronger evidence, and presumptuously refuse to examine that, which is already proposed to them. But the Lord God is not at their command; nor will he model his dispensations according to their wishes. O beware, lest, in righteous judgment for your arrogance, he leave you to yourselves! "Light is come into the world;" and, if your eyes have not discerned its excellency, the reason is, you have "loved darkness rather than light:" and your final condemnation will be much more aggravated, when you are compared with others who have made good improvement of inferior advantages.

Better things might have been expected from many of our Lord's captious hearers, who had once discovered a hopeful disposition. The kingdom of Satan seemed to be shaken amongst them; but they fell back again to their former condition of a willing subjection to his government, and gave him a more entire ascendancy over their minds: and therefore Jesus foretold, that their "last state would be worse than the first." On this occasion he delivered the parable of the relapsing demoniac. The evil spirit may depart for a time, as if he had quitted his hold of the poor enslaved sinner, and yet may return to his possession. The door being

open,

open, the heart prepared to comply with his ſuggeſtions, and no contrary principle forbidding his admiſſion, he will enter with greater ſtrength, and lead the captive ſoul, with increaſing obduracy, from one degree of wickedneſs to another.

This deſcribes a common caſe. Many are deeply affected by the faithful and lively preaching of the Goſpel; and a temporary reformation takes place. Their attention may be rouſed, their paſſions moved, and eſpecially their fears alarmed by the ſtriking addreſſes of ſome plain practical preacher; and then they cannot continue in the ſame vain and ſinful habits as before. Like Herod, who "heard John the Baptiſt gladly, and did many things," they may expreſs a warm approbation of the miniſter, and amend their conduct, at leaſt in certain enormities; ſo that it may ſeem as if the evil ſpirit was expelled. But they reſt in a mere external change, and fail of a real converſion of the heart; and therefore Satan, who has withdrawn his influence for a time, obtains a free admiſſion again. The habitation is made ready for his reception; and he returns with ſeven-fold force. How terrible the conſequence! A relapſe is often more to be dreaded than the firſt attack of a diſorder. "Evil men and ſeducers wax worſe and worſe *:" "the latter end is worſe with them than the beginning †." Let us, therefore, implore the God of all grace, ſo to drive out the prince of darkneſs, that He himſelf may take full and everlaſting poſſeſſion of our ſouls, and nothing be "able to

* 2 Tim. iii. 13. † 2 Pet. ii. 20.

ſeparate

ſeparate us from the love of God, which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord."

In this awful manner Jeſus continued to preach the word with unſhaken fortitude and unwearied patience, expoſing himſelf to the malevolence of his enemies by his pointed reproofs, and exhauſting his bodily ſtrength by inceſſant labours. While he was thus employed, a certain woman, impreſſed by his exhortations, exclaimed, as if in envious admiration of the happineſs of her, who was favoured with ſuch a Son: but he replied, that a far greater privilege is conferred on thoſe, who believe and obey the Goſpel. His pious mother, together with ſome near relations, ſtood at a diſtance, and, probably through anxiety for his welfare, wiſhed to call him away. It ſeems they were prevented from approaching, by the ſurrounding multitudes. It was, therefore, intimated to him, that they were waiting to ſpeak with him. But he, ſtill intent upon his important work, and to encourage the attendance of his faithful followers, declared, that thoſe who truly received and practiſed his word, were much dearer to him, than the neareſt among his earthly connections, merely as ſuch, could poſſibly be. He meant not to ſlight his mother or any of his kindred, but to ſhew that we ſhould be ſuperior to all carnal and worldly regards, by looking beyond the ties of conſanguinity; and in order to animate his diſciples to diligence and perſeverance in his ſervice, he took that opportunity of expreſſing his warmeſt affection for them.

Are any perſons ready to congratulate the bleſſed Virgin, who had the diſtinguiſhed honour of bringing forth

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the Saviour of mankind? The way is here pointed out, in which you may obtain a ſuperior dignity. Only yield an unfeigned reſpect to the Goſpel, give up your whole hearts to God, and walk in cheerful obedience to his commands, and you ſhall be happier, and dearer to Jeſus, than any natural relation to him could make you. If you profeſs a peculiar attachment and number yourſelves among his followers, we aſk, whether you are willing to walk in holineſs as he requires. Or, are you ſatisfied with paying him an unmeaning compliment, as if it could pleaſe him, to cry, "Lord, Lord," while you regard not his precepts? Obſerve, that he pronounces his benediction upon thoſe, who not only HEAR, but DO, his word, and perform the "will of his Father." Are you ſuch? Or, are you not conſcious, that ſome or other of your tempers and practices expreſsly contradict his injunctions? You muſt ſearch out, and put away from you "the accurſed thing," which he hateth; or elſe it were preſumption to expect his favourable notice.

You, who have devoted yourſelves to him "without partiality and without hypocriſy," may take freſh courage, ſince you are aſſured from his own mouth, how dear you are to him. You are in his account, as "a brother, a ſiſter, and a mother." Do you know, what thoſe tender names imply? Yet you cannot conceive the ſtrength of his affection for you. How ample is the recompenſe he beſtows, for all you can do or ſuffer in his cauſe! O let a ſenſe of his unmerited and extenſive love excite you to more vigorous and cheerful

exertions,

exertions, that you may expreſs your gratitude, and promote his glory!

But let " the ſinners in Zion be afraid, and fearfulneſs ſurpriſe the hypocrites." The eye of Jeſus diſcerns your inſincerity under every ſpecious diſguiſe, which you may aſſume. And in what light do you appear before him? Does he regard you as " a brother, a ſiſter, and a mother?" No: he deteſts the baſeneſs of your character; and he will avenge the inſults you put upon him. O caſt off the maſk of an unſound profeſſion; confeſs your iniquity; ſue to him for pardon, while he waits to be gracious; and implore the influence of his Spirit, " to the end he may ſtabliſh your hearts unblamable in holineſs!"

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. I.

Jesus repaired to the sea-shore, and instructed the multitude by the parables of the sower—the tares—the growth of corn—the grain of mustard-seed—the leaven in meal—the treasure hid in a field—the pearl of great price—and the net gathering different kinds of fishes.

THE life, at least the public life, of Jesus was very short, but, being employed in almost constant exertions for the glory of God and the benefit of men, it was crowded with important events. If we possessed a larger measure of his activity and zeal, much might be done in the contracted period of our existence upon earth; for our usefulness depends not on length of days, but on their diligent improvement.

The friends of Jesus were, perhaps, apprehensive that he would impair his strength by incessant labours; and therefore they endeavoured to draw him away from the multitude, that he might have some intermission. Probably, he yielded to their importunity, and retired: but "the same day" he appeared again in public, concerned for the people, who came from all parts to hear his heavenly doctrines. It cannot be wrong to pay a prudent regard to our health; for religion

gion requires not any efforts, to which our bodily frame is unequal. But, from an attention to ourſelves, let us not plead for indolence, or neglect thoſe opportunities of doing good, which are, evidently, within our power. May it pleaſe God to "ſhed abroad his love in our hearts by the Holy Ghoſt," that his work may ever be our delight! Then ſhall we lament, that our uſefulneſs is ſo confined, and that our beſt exertions bear no proportion to the extent of our deſires.

No ſooner did Jeſus quit the houſe, to which he had withdrawn, than immenſe numbers ſurrounded him, as before *. Being ſituated near the ſea, for the better convenience of delivering his inſtructions, he entered into a ſhip, from which he addreſſed the people, who ſtood upon the ſhore in a ſerious and reſpectful manner to hear him. He ſpake to them by parables, that is, by certain likeneſſes or repreſentations, taken from the ordinary occurrences of life, in which, while a common hiſtory ſeems to be related, ſome ſpiritual information is meant to be conveyed. This method of teaching was frequent among the ancients; and it is happily calculated to ſtrike the mind, and leave a laſting impreſſion upon the memory. He propoſed to the conſideration of the audience, then aſſembled before him, various ſimilitudes of this kind, all of them tending to ſhew the nature of his kingdom upon earth, the character of its true members, its gradual augmentation and invaluable bleſſings.

The parable of the ſower ſtands firſt in order. Here an attentive and diligent huſbandman is exhibited, in

* Mat. xiii. 1—23. Mark iv. 1—25. Luke viii. 4—18.

the cultivation of an extenſive field. Deſirous of procuring a large increaſe, he took care that good ſeed ſhould be ſown upon every part of it: but, as it conſiſted of different ſorts of ſoil, the effect was very different. In one place, where the ground was hard as a beaten path, the ſeed could not enter, and, as it lay expoſed, was either deſtroyed by the feet of paſſengers, or devoured by the birds. Another place afforded a promiſing appearance for a ſhort time: the ground was rocky, being covered only with a thin coat of earth; and this for a while gave nouriſhment to the grain, which was caſt upon it; but, having no depth, it could not defend the root from the ſcorching ſun; and therefore the whole of the produce ſoon withered away. A third ſituation proved unfavourable to the good ſeed; for the thorns, which grew there, checked the efforts of the riſing corn, and effectually prevented it from coming to maturity. Was, therefore, all the labour vain? No: there was one portion of the field which anſwered the expectations of the owner: it brought forth a plentiful increaſe, though in various degrees, which gradually ripened till the time of harveſt, and was then gathered into the barn.

At the concluſion of this little narration, Jeſus required his audience to fix their attention upon it, as involving truths of the greateſt importance. He proclaimed aloud, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear;" which intimated, that ſome would underſtand and regard the inſtruction, whilſt it would be totally loſt upon others.

But wherefore did he uſe ſuch a ſtudied obſcurity in his preaching? His very diſciples ſeemed unable to account for it, and therefore afterwards put the queſtion in private, "Why ſpeakeſt thou unto them in parables?" and beſought him to explain his deſign. This gave him occaſion to vindicate that peculiar manner of teaching. A parable will readily be comprehended by thoſe, who are ſeriouſly diſpoſed and deſirous of uſeful information; but to others it may appear to have no meaning, or none of any conſequence. This, he obſerved, was intended in juſt judgment againſt thoſe, who had deſpiſed his plaineſt declarations. He replied to his diſciples, to the following effect: "The myſteries of the kingdom, which remain a ſecret to them, are in rich mercy revealed unto you, my beloved friends. And this method is agreeable to the righteous proceedings of God, who in general diſpenſes his favours to men, according to their temper and improvement. Thoſe, therefore, who have refuſed to be convinced on the ſtrongeſt evidence, and have contemptuouſly rejected all the offers of my grace, ſhall be given up to a judicial blindneſs and obduracy; ſo that, how long ſoever they may be ſpared under means and ordinances, they never will be brought to a true and ſpiritual underſtanding of the Goſpel. How great, then, is your bleſſedneſs, who have obtained a divine illumination, whereby you perceive the doctrines, which I deliver, and feel their powerful influence upon your minds! You are diſtinguiſhed above the moſt eminent ſaints of old, who ſaw but through a glaſs darkly, and

looked forwards, with ardent desires, to the advantages and privileges, which you now enjoy."

Such was the purport of our Lord's interesting address to his disciples: and a solemn warning it conveys to us. We must render an account to God, for the religious opportunities, with which we are favoured. He hath sent to us the Gospel of his Son, and He will shortly enquire, What reception we have given it. Are there not many among us, who will not even examine it with seriousness, but, like the Pharisees, disdainfully put away the truth from them? No wonder then, that to you, who are of this character, the doctrines of Jesus appear obscure or inconsistent. O be afraid, lest, while you shut your eyes and stop your ears, God determine in his wrath, that they never shall be opened! The day of grace may be expired, with respect to some, even while they are suffered to remain upon earth. O listen to those, who beseech you, "that ye receive not the grace of God in vain!"—"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation *!"

This very caution is inculcated in the parable before us. That we may enter more fully into the subject, let us advert to our Lord's explanation. Jesus is "the Sower," who by himself and his ministers scatters abroad the good seed of his word. But alas! the most excellent instruction does not always produce the desired effects: through various causes men are prevented from receiving that real advantage, which it is calcu-

* 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.

lated to promote. Theſe cauſes exiſt in the men themſelves.

Some are hard and impenetrable as the ground, on which they tread; fitly compared, therefore, to "the way-ſide." They give no ſerious attention to the momentous truths, which they hear, nor take any pains to underſtand them. Upon theſe, then, no good impreſſion is made: the word preached to them is ſoon forgotten and loſt: they do not even reſiſt the attempts of Satan, who is hovering around, like a bird of prey, and who, to fruſtrate the deſign of the Goſpel, will artfully contrive to divert their minds from it, by propoſing ſubjects more pleaſing to their carnal nature.

But others are affected with the declarations of the Goſpel. So far the ſeed is admitted, as their paſſions are moved by the things, which are ſpoken to them. They liſten with avidity, form the beſt reſolutions, and diſcover an ardent zeal for religion. But alas! like the rocky ground, they have no depth: and therefore their convictions are haſty and ſuperficial, not being able to penetrate their hearts. Their profeſſions may be warm, and excite notice and admiration: but the trying ſeaſon is at hand, in which all their fine appearances will wither away. Troubles, like the ſcorching ſun, will prove, that their principles have not taken firm root within, as theſe have not influence enough to ſupport them.

A third ſort may alſo promiſe fair, and preſerve a ſhew of piety for a length of time. The blade ſprings up, and endures the various changes of the weather. Yet it does not thrive; for thorns ſurround and choke

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it. Ah! how many constantly attend upon the ministry of the Gospel, in whom no saving effect is produced! The cares, riches, and pleasures of life so engross their minds, that no proper heed can be given to the truth, which is heard; and, of consequence, it is lost upon them; for, with a heart so much attached to secular concerns, they cannot possess any spiritual life or vigour. They may maintain their place in the visible Church; but, when we look for the fruits of righteousness, we are disappointed; and their religion is vain.

The labour, however, of the husbandman is not in every instance unprofitable. There are those, who resemble the good ground, who are prepared by divine grace for a due reception of the heavenly word. Their supreme regard is fixed upon it; they perceive its important meaning, and cherish it in their hearts, till the grand design of it is answered. "They walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God *." A difference, indeed, in their excellence and usefulness is observable; but all bring forth fruit to maturity, and some in an eminent degree. Their sincerity is proved by their perseverance in holiness. They endure every trial; they stand both the winter's cold, and the summer's heat, and "go on unto perfection."

Can we avoid making the application? If we are favoured with the preaching of "the everlasting Gospel," and constantly attend upon it, let us enquire, What is the effect produced? Do we seriously meditate on what we hear? Is any deep and lasting impression fixed upon

* Col. i. 10.

our minds? Are any ſpiritual principles implanted, and habits formed? Is our religion ſuch, as will carry us through temptations and perſecutions? Is it ſuch, as renders us ſuperior to the ſolicitations of the fleſh, and the allurements of the world? Do none of theſe things take up that time and thought, which ſhould be devoted to the care of the ſoul? And are we not, conſequently, in a lean and barren ſtate, notwithſtanding the faithful adminiſtration of the ſacred ordinances around us? If thoſe only receive real advantage from the Goſpel, who are ſo affected by it, as to bring forth the ſubſtantial fruits of holineſs, do we come under that deſcription? Or what is the profit, which has accrued from our profeſſion?

The Saviour ſubjoined a moſt ſolemn caution, reminding his diſciples, that divine light was communicated to them for the benefit of others, and that they ſhould make a good improvement of the inſtructions delivered, by recommending the ſame important truths to the world around them. And ought not we, alſo, to conſider, for what intent our religious privileges are beſtowed upon us? Do we ſhine, in our reſpective places, as "lights of the world," deſirous to impart knowledge to them, who are in darkneſs? It ſhould be remembered, that, if our diſtinguiſhed favours are not turned to ſome uſeful account, we may not only be ſoon deprived of them, but ſhall be ſeverely condemned for the neglect.

On the ſame occaſion, it ſhould ſeem, our Lord delivered the parable of the tares *. Here again a com-

* Mat. xiii. 24—30. 36—43.

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mon ſtory is related, for the purpoſe of communicating ſpiritual information. A field was ſown with good ſeed, which, from its favourable growth, promiſed a plentiful increaſe. But, through the malicious interference of one, who was an enemy to the owner of the land, and through the negligence of the ſervants, to whom it was committed, tares were ſcattered among the wheat. The injury was not diſcovered, till the fruit of the corn appeared; and then it was propoſed to root up the noxious weeds, which obſtructed the ripening of the crop. The maſter, however, rejected that ſcheme, as being attended with ſome danger, and allowed the tares to remain, commanding only, that in the time of harveſt they ſhould be carefully ſeparated, and conſumed by fire, while the good grain ſhould be collected and ſecured in the ſtorehouſe.

What inſtruction, then, does this narrative convey? The diſciples did not at firſt perceive it, and therefore afterwards, when Jeſus retired, they requeſted him to explain it. In condeſcenſion to their enquiries, he gave a clear and minute interpretation; from which we learn, that the parable exhibits the preſent ſtate of his kingdom or the viſible Church, as it conſiſts of a mixed company, hypocritical pretenders as well as real believers. Theſe may not always be diſtinguiſhable from each other, and for wiſe purpoſes may be ſuffered to continue in the ſame religious community. The latter only are "the children of the kingdom," entitled to its bleſſings; and they poſſeſs their high privileges merely by the grace of Jeſus; for He it is, who ſows the good ſeed in his field. The former are "the children

dren of the wicked one," being induced by his influence to put on the ſemblance of piety; whilſt they ſtill bear his likeneſs, cheerfully comply with his temptations, and do his work. In the raſhneſs of our zeal, we might ſometimes wiſh a greater ſeparation to be made, than the preſent ſyſtem of things will admit: we might wiſh that the ſaints of God were no longer "vexed with the filthy converſation of the wicked." But we muſt wait for that event till the end of the world, the great harveſt: and then, how accurate will be the diſtinction of characters, how wide the difference between them! The reapers, who are the Angels of God, cannot err in the awful diviſion, which they ſhall make, or appoint any individual to an improper place. Every tare ſhall be burned with fire: every grain of wheat ſhall be ſafely lodged in the heavenly garner. How tremendous the deſtruction of the ungodly in that "furnace of fire, where ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing of teeth!" How excellent the glory, into which the righteous ſhall enter, where they "ſhall ſhine forth as the ſun, in the kingdom of their Father!"

May God excite in us "great ſearchings of heart!" What is our preſent character? What our future proſpect? We are fixed in the outward Church of Chriſt; but we are not therefore ſecure of an admiſſion into his bliſsful preſence above. Poſſibly, we may wear the garb of ſanctity; and others may not ſuſpect any inſincerity in us. But unleſs we are renewed in righteouſneſs, and "have our fruit unto holineſs," our hope is preſumptuous, and our "expectations ſhall periſh." Nor let the impenitent flatter themſelves, that they ſhall eſcape

escape detection, in the midst of so immense a multitude. Sinners, be assured, that the eye of God perfectly discerns you now, and that his hand will find you out hereafter. Whatever fair appearances you may assume, or whatever plausible excuses you may frame, His righteous judgment shall be executed: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal *."

Our Lord also delivered, probably to the same audience, various other similitudes, all of them instructive and important †.

He referred them to the gradual increase of corn by the inexplicable principle of vegetation, as a representation of the progress of his spiritual kingdom. The seed is cast into the ground, and, without any further care of the husbandman, it rises insensibly, and advances by degrees to a state of maturity, when, being fully ripe, it is cut down and gathered into the barn.

The interpretation is obvious. The work of God, both in the Church as a community, and in the heart of each individual believer, is carried on imperceptibly, like the growth of corn, in a way which depends not on human management, and which we cannot explain. The seed may appear to perish in the earth, or the blade to spring up in a very slow manner, while the mysterious process goes forward without interruption. Let us not despond, though we see not the most favourable appearances at once; nor let us be impatient, though we perceive not, after a length of time, the per-

* Mat. xxv. 46.

† Mat. xiii. 31—35. 44—53. Mark iv. 26—34.

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fection of grace either in ourſelves or others. Let us pray, that the Goſpel may ſpread its influence from one kingdom to another, and that we ourſelves may " go from ſtrength to ſtrength." We wait for the harveſt: may we all be ripening for it; that, when the great Reaper " putteth in the ſickle" (as he will at the hour of death, with reſpect to every ſeparate perſon), we may be received into his celeſtial garner!

The ſame inſtruction is conveyed in the parable of the grain of muſtard-ſeed. This, though one of the leaſt of ſeeds, it is obſerved, produced in eaſtern countries a tree ſo large, that the birds might build their neſts in its branches. The aſtoniſhing increaſe exhibits the mighty power of God in his providence; and equally illuſtrious is the diſplay of his grace, in cauſing his Goſpel to ſpread and flouriſh, from the ſmalleſt and moſt contemptible appearances, till it ſhall fill the earth, and afford a refuge in the Church for men of all ranks and characters, and for all the nations of the world. The progreſs in our day may ſeem inconſiderable; but we look forwards, with cheerful hopes, to thoſe glorious times, when the branches of this tree ſhall be ſo enlarged, as to reach the moſt diſtant lands: for " the kingdoms of this world ſhall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Chriſt *." The caſe is ſimilar, with reſpect to the eſtabliſhment of divine grace in the heart of every Chriſtian. This holy principle may ſeem, in its beginning, to poſſeſs little influence, and promiſe no great improvement. But the plant is under the peculiar care of Heaven,

* Rev. xi. 15.

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and, being watered from above, it ſhall thrive and proſper. It ſhall gradually extend its ſhoots, till it occupy every part of the ſoul, in which it has been fixed.

Our Lord confirmed and illuſtrated this truth, by the parable of the leaven, which he deſcribed as put into a large quantity of meal. This, being inconſiderable in its bulk, may lie concealed for a time, as if it had no effect; but its operation, though ſecret, is powerful; and, as its fermentation ſpreads by degrees, it will diffuſe itſelf through the whole maſs. Juſt ſo, the Goſpel, which was of little account in the world at firſt, is in a progreſſive ſtate, and, we truſt, will increaſe more and more, till it reduce all nations to "the obedience of faith." "A little one ſhall become a thouſand, and a ſmall one a ſtrong nation. The Lord will haſten it in his time *." Nor is the caſe at all different, wherever the ſacred influence of God's Spirit is put into the heart. For a ſeaſon it may not excite notice: much weakneſs may ſeem to attend its firſt efforts; ſo that the change produced may not ſhew itſelf in every part, or in any remarkable manner. But the operation, which is accompanied with a mighty energy, will be effectual in the end. It will be felt in every faculty and member, and gain a complete aſcendancy over the whole man. Such is the uſual advancement of religion in the ſoul.

Is this what we are acquainted with, in our own particular ſtate? We would encourage any favourable appearances, any feeble attempts to ſerve God "in ſpi-

* Iſa. lx. 22.

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rit and in truth." "For who hath despised the day of small things *?" Yet we are taught to expect a gradual progress; and therefore we enquire, Are we growing in grace? Do we increase in spiritual light and vigour, and become more and more confirmed in holy principles and habits? Doubtless, we should feel an ardent desire, that the Gospel may extend its influence from house to house, and from town to town, in every nation, till it reach the remotest corners of the earth. But let us not forget OURSELVES, nor cease to lift up our prayer, that, professing the truth of God, we may feel more of the efficacy of our own principles, and be gradually transformed into the divine likeness "from glory to glory." May the sanctifying energy of our religion diffuse itself throughout all our faculties, and bring our affections, words, and actions, into subjection under the government of Christ!

Thus Jesus continued to describe the nature of his kingdom by figurative illustrations. This method of teaching, indeed, has something of obscurity in it; and that obscurity was intended: for many of his audience could not bear a more clear and avowed declaration, so that he might have hazarded his life, by speaking more explicitly. Besides, in this very way of delivering his instructions by parables, he accommodated himself to an ancient scripture, which is therefore said to be fulfilled in him.

Other similitudes were added, which were calculated to give direction and encouragement to his disciples. The Gospel may fitly be compared to an im-

* Zech. iv. 10.

menſe treaſure; it is an inexhauſtible mine of ſpiritual riches. This may be repreſented as "hid in a field:" the valuable ſubſtance, not being expoſed on the ſurface, may eſcape the notice of careleſs obſervers, and cannot be explored without much pains. Men of carnal diſpoſitions are not aware, how many and precious bleſſings are compriſed in that ſalvation, which they neglect and depiſe. But thoſe who perceive its tranſcendent worth, will "rejoice as one that findeth great ſpoil *," and gladly relinquiſh every other poſſeſſion, if neceſſary, that they may ſecure it for their own. Who, then, among us are deſirous to purchaſe this field, which contains ſuch inexpreſſible wealth? Alas! do you not betray your ignorance of "the kingdom of heaven," who eſtimate the Goſpel at a low rate? It would not paſs with you for a trifle, as it now does, if you were acquainted with its hidden treaſure. You would not ſcruple to part with any thing for Chriſt's ſake, if you properly underſtood the value of his grace. You pour contempt upon him, if you do not prefer him to the beſt enjoyments of the world, or if you heſitate to ſacrifice them all, when they ſtand in competition with him.

This, alſo, we learn from the parable of the pearl of great price. A merchant, in ſearch of rich commodities, having diſcovered a pearl of peculiar excellency, abandoned every other purſuit, and relinquiſhed all his gains, that he might purchaſe that one jewel. Such is the man, who obtains a true knowledge of the Saviour, and becomes a member of his kingdom. It

* Pſal. cxix. 162.

may be, he has long been in quest of happiness, and each favourite object appeared to him, for a time, as a beautiful gem: but he found continual disappointment, till he heard of Jesus, and beheld something of his glory, when every thing else lost its former charms, and seemed trifling and worthless, in comparison. Then he began to desire, most ardently, the grace of Jesus, and fixed all his attention upon that one point, being willing to sustain any loss, and renounce every advantage, for the acquisition of that high prize. Have you, then, any proper conceptions of the value of Christ, who shrink from his service, because it requires so many painful sacrifices? Do you apprehend, that you shall pay too dear for his benefits? No, Sirs: this is the pearl of so great price, that there can be nothing in the whole world equivalent to it. Give up interest, pleasures, reputation, friends, and relatives, father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, and children; yet, if Jesus be your's, we will congratulate you on your immense gain. Whatever you lose, you receive "unsearchable and durable riches" in Him; and therefore you may adopt the Apostle's exultation, "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things *."

But let no man deceive himself. It will not suffice to "name the name of Christ," where there is no cordial attachment to him. And are there not many professors of the Gospel, who by their formality, worldliness, or sensuality, disgrace the cause? These weaken the hands, and distress the hearts, of faithful ministers. Yet let us not be staggered, since our

* 2 Cor vi. 10.

Lord has taught us to expect it by the following similitude.

He subjoined another parable, taken from the practice of fishermen. They cast their net into the sea, which collects various kinds of fishes; nor can any separation of them be made, till they are brought to the shore; but then the useful are preserved, and the worthless rejected. So mixed is the present state of the Church, and such will be the final division of its members. Those, who preach the Gospel, go forth, as it were upon the wide ocean of the world, to throw the net, desirous of inclosing in it all they can. Many may accordingly be taken, who may not be approved upon an exact scrutiny. And such a scrutiny will be instituted at the end of the world. Who can abide the strict examination? The Angels will part the different characters asunder, however close their connection may now be. They, who possess only the form of godliness, shall then be for ever excluded from the society of the saints, among whom they were numbered here; and their portion shall be assigned them in "the furnace of fire," where they shall for ever "wail" their sin and folly, and "gnash their teeth" through the extremity of rage, anguish, and despair.

So solemn and alarming were the addresses of Jesus. And if his servants in the Gospel endeavour to speak, as he did, they must remind their hearers of the important distinction, which subsists between them, and thus, by faithful admonitions, "take forth the precious

cious from the vile *." Their work is difficult, and often painful. How necessary is it for them to be well acquainted with the religion, which they teach! Let them attend, then, to the question, which Jesus proposed to his disciples: "Have ye understood all these things?" Let them consider, too, what improvement should be made. The Scribes, who are "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," or properly qualified to declare its mysteries, resemble the housholder, who has a large family to provide for. They should therefore treasure up every useful observation, that they may always be able to communicate something from their stock, for the service of the family. While they are concerned for their own support, they must employ their fund, whatever it may be, for the benefit of those committed to them, "giving them their portion of meat in due season."

Let prayer be offered to God without ceasing, both for them who preach, and them who hear, the Gospel; that the former may dispense the word with all fidelity, and the latter receive it with meekness. Let us thankfully accept the salutary provisions, which the great Lord of the houshold has here set before us, and feed upon them to our spiritual nourishment. May we be led to try our own characters, and be alarmed or comforted, as our case may render most expedient! May God in mercy prevent us from being deceived to our eternal ruin: and "if in any thing we be otherwise minded," than we ought to be, may he "reveal even this unto us!" Amen.

* Jer. xv. 19.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 18.

Jesus replied to some who professed a regard to him—appeased a storm on the sea—cured two possessed persons—rejected by the Gadarenes—returned to Galilee—healed a woman of her bloody flux—restored Jairus's daughter to life— gave sight to two blind men—expelled a demon—preached again at Nazareth, and in various other places.

"LOOKING unto Jesus" is not only the bounden duty, but the high privilege, of the real Christian; and therefore it will be his daily and delightful employment. Let us not be weary of contemplating our divine exemplar. Much we have yet to learn, since we have hitherto seen but little, in comparison, of his excellency. As we attend him through the exercise of his public ministry, we shall observe him in almost every place confirming his heavenly doctrines by incontestable miracles, and affording the strongest evidence, that he was indeed "the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

In the evening of the very same day, on which he had been teaching the people by parables, he proposed to his disciples to pass over the sea, or the lake of Gennesareth *,

Gennefareth *. As they prepared to take ſhip, a certain perſon, and, it ſhould ſeem, a man of ſome note, being a Scribe, came to Jeſus profeſſing a high regard for him, and a fixed determination to continue with him, as one of his ſtated followers. The appearance was pleaſing and hopeful: ſo that we might have haſtily concluded him to be a real convert. But Jeſus, who "knew what was in man," diſcovered an inſincerity of heart under this fair diſguiſe. The Scribe, probably expected ſome very lucrative or honourable poſt; as it was generally thought, that the Meſſiah would eſtabliſh a temporal dominion. Jeſus, however, warned him that no worldly emoluments were to be looked for from the ſervice of ſo poor and deſpiſed a Maſter. "The foxes," ſaid he, "have holes, and the birds of the air have neſts; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

How aſtoniſhing the declaration! How low and calamitous the ſituation, to which "the Lord from heaven" ſubmitted! Here, then, we perceive "the grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that, though he was rich, yet for our ſakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich †." And what could his followers expect, but to be ſharers of his affliction, and therefore to be deſtitute of all preſent comforts and conveniences. "The diſciple is not above his maſter, nor the ſervant above his lord." Such an intimation was enough to ſtagger the reſolution of a man, who

* Mat. viii. 18—27. Mark iv. 35, &c. Luke viii. 22—25. ix. 57, &c. † 2 Cor. viii. 9.

fought only fecular advantages; and it is probable, that he inftantly withdrew.

In another we perceive a far lefs regard to Jefus, than was due to his high character, and in one too, who feems to have been a profeffed difciple for fome time. When our Lord called him to a ftated attendance, and a renunciation of all other employments, the man was difpofed to procraftinate, and therefore, with a view to excufe himfelf for a feafon, defired permiffion to perform the funeral folemnities of his father. The requeft appeared reafonable: for religion does not forbid, but rather enjoin, all due refpect to be fhewn to friends and relations. But Jefus, knowing it to be a mere pretence, or at leaft a mark of fome reluctancy to engage in the work of God, which might have been augmented by an interview with his former connections, demanded an immediate compliance with the call. He replied, " Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou, and preach the kingdom of God." As if he had faid, " Sooner let any office be neglected, than that of the facred miniftry, to which thou art appointed. Leave it, therefore, to thofe, who being dead to God are unfit for his fervice, to bury their deceafed kindred: but delay not thou, through any carnal regards, to enter upon and profecute thy important function."

An example of like fort occurred, on another occafion. A third perfon profeffed a refolution to become a follower of Jefus. And what prevented him? He had certain affairs to fettle, or friends to take leave of, if not to confult. This might feem to us expedient and proper. But there was a fecret unfoundnefs,

 a wrong

a wrong attachment to worldly connections, a wavering mind, a desire to regain the things which had been renounced, as in the case of Lot's wife. Our Lord, therefore, detecting his hypocrisy, replied, "No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Do not similar instances present themselves, under our own observation? Do not many "halt between two opinions?" Or "turn to the Lord, not with their whole heart, but feignedly?" Their supreme affections are fixed upon secular objects; and therefore, though with fair and plausible words they declare their approbation of Christianity, they will comply with its dictates no farther, than their convenience will admit.

Various excuses are urged. It is said, "We have too much business of another kind, to give that attention to religion, which is required." Or, "Our connections are unfavourable to our wishes, and we cannot detach ourselves from them." But will these pretexts bear a serious examination? Or will any deliberately maintain, that the care of the soul and the service of Christ may be safely neglected, till every worldly obstruction be removed? If you are unwilling to contend with difficulties, the Saviour will disown you, and treat you as avowed opposers.

"But we intend, after a time, to be his faithful disciples. When this or the other scheme is accomplished, we are resolved to trifle no longer, but to obey his injunctions with the utmost ardour and without reserve." Ah! Sirs, will he admit of such an answer to the solemn call of his Gospel? He requires your submission

miſſion now; and for you to talk of yielding a compliance, only on a future day, is to declare that you prefer the world to him. You do in fact, therefore, reject him, while you plead for a delay. He knows the ground of your excuſes; and remember, he deteſts the double mind, whatever ſpecious diſguiſes it may aſſume.

When Jeſus had taken ſhip, and launched out into the deep, a ſevere ſtorm aroſe, and the diſciples were diſtreſſed by the apprehenſion of immediate deſtruction: for the veſſel ſeemed on the very point of ſinking. But where was their beloved Maſter? Wearied out with the labours of the preceding day, he had fallen aſleep. What? could he be ignorant or regardleſs of the danger of his faithful attendants? No: but he deſigned to try the ſtrength of their confidence in him, and to ſhew their ſecurity under his protection. They awoke him, and cried in terror and anguiſh, "Lord, ſave us, we periſh." How ſtrange, how inconſiſtent was this! Will not the weakeſt believer allow, that it was impoſſible to periſh, with Jeſus in the ſhip? But imminent perils will ſometimes render even advanced Chriſtians ſtrangely forgetful of their own principles, and prove them defective in faith, as indeed they are in every grace. The fears, perplexities, and deſpondency, which ſome of them diſcover in ſuch ſituations, ſufficiently evince it.

Jeſus reproved them ſharply for their unbelief; and then, to encourage their unreſerved reliance upon him in every future difficulty, and to demonſtrate that all nature was at his command, he aroſe with a peculiar majeſty, and ſpake the authoritative word: the furious

winds

winds inſtantly ceaſed to blow, and the turbulent ſea was calm. Such a grand diſplay of his divine power aſtoniſhed them: "the men marvelled." They ought, indeed, to have recollected, that he was the God of the whole creation; and this very miracle might have led them to that concluſion. "O Lord God of hoſts, who is a ſtrong Lord, like unto thee? Thou ruleſt the raging of the ſea: when the waves thereof ariſe, thou ſtilleſt them *." But ſo much darkneſs yet remained in their minds, that they had no clear or conſiſtent views of "the great myſtery of godlineſs," and perhaps ſome of them might then conſider him as no more than a human being.

The diſtreſſed ſituation of the diſciples is an apt emblem of the Church, and of many private Chriſtians, in perilous circumſtances. It is one principal part of the Redeemer's plan to exerciſe and prove our faith; and therefore he conducts us through various trials. He affords us his gracious preſence, and, while we paſs over the tempeſtuous ſea of life, we ought to be ſatiſfied, that he is in the veſſel with us. If we are his people, we muſt be ſecure; becauſe our ſafety is in him. Let us not preſumptuouſly impeach his wiſdom, faithfulneſs, or love, when he ſuffers the ſevereſt ſtorm to ariſe, though he ſhould even then ſeem regardleſs of our danger. Our buſy fears may ſuggeſt, that we ſhall ſurely be loſt, and we may be almoſt overwhelmed with perplexity and deſpair. His deſign is, that we ſhould ſhew an entire and cheerful dependence upon him; but we ſoon betray our unbelief, and treat him, as the diſ-

* Pſal. lxxxix. 8, 9.

ciples

ciples did. If, then, we can truſt him no longer, than while the calm continues, "where is our faith?" Or, "why are we ſo fearful?" Let us be aſhamed of our doubtful and ſuſpicious temper; and, adoring the power and grace of this mighty God and Saviour, let us learn, with unſhaken confidence, to repoſe ourſelves and our concerns in his hands.

The ſtorm being appeaſed, they arrived in ſafety at the country of the Gadarenes, oppoſite to Galilee: and immediately an occaſion was offered for the exhibition of his divine character, which excited general attention *. There met him two perſons poſſeſſed with devils, in a ſtate of the utmoſt diſtraction and fury, driven out from ſociety, and incapable of being governed or reſtrained †. Many circumſtances in this caſe are not to be accounted for, on any other ſuppoſition than that of a real demoniacal influence. We here perceive, indeed, an awful repreſentation of the wretchedneſs, in which we ſhould be involved, if ſubjected to the malice of infernal ſpirits. A conſiderable number (for their name was Legion) had entered into theſe unhappy men, and reduced them to the moſt miſerable condition. When our Lord beheld the pitiable objects, he commanded the demons to quit their hold. This they were unwilling to do; and yet they were conſtrained to acknowledge the ſuperior power of Jeſus, as "the Son of the moſt high God," and were terrified at his preſence, as criminals before their judge. Being

* Mat. viii. 28, &c. ix. 1. Mark v. 1—21. Luke viii. 26—40.

† As St. Mark and St. Luke mention only one perſon, it ſhould ſeem that one was more fierce, and therefore more an object of notice than the other.

perfectly

perfectly aware of that extremity of torment, which will shortly be executed upon them by Christ himself, they requested that their final punishment might not be inflicted before the time. They entreated him, also, not to dismiss them entirely from that country, and, probably with a mischievous and destructive intention, desired permission to enter into a numerous herd of swine in the neighbourhood. Permission, accordingly, was granted, not to gratify but confound their malice; and immediately the whole herd, to the amount of two thousand, rushed into the deep with violence, and perished in the waters.

This was a remarkable transaction. It has been treated with impious ridicule; but it ought to be observed, as a sufficient answer to objections, that, by this very occurrence, Jesus has demonstrated the reality of possessions, the malevolence of infernal spirits, and their entire subjection to him: for they owned his dominion, when they solicited his leave to execute their purpose. He displayed, likewise, his boundless mercy in " destroying the works of the devil." At the same time, those, who had kept the swine, were justly punished by the loss of them, for their avarice and profaneness, as their employment and traffic were illegal. Let us love and praise our gracious Redeemer, who has come to deliver us from so miserable a bondage, as that of the powers of darkness. Let us entreat his exertions in our own behalf, and cry to him, " O Lord, give us not over to their malice, but, by thy mighty aid, extricate us out of their hands, and bring us into the glorious liberty of thy dear children!"

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The report of this event caused a general consternation among the inhabitants. They flocked in great multitudes to see the Person, who had wrought so stupendous a miracle; and, as if struck with a sense of their guilt, and afraid of his presence, lest he should bring some deserved judgments upon them, they unanimously requested him to "depart out of their coasts." Little did they understand what they asked. Shall sinners petition, that the Lord of life and glory would leave them to themselves? How dreadful must be the consequence! Better be destitute of all, both friends and substance, than be deserted by the Saviour. Yet such is the folly and stupidity of men; they are unwilling to abandon their sensual pleasures and worldly advantages, or to be disturbed in their old practices, however unjustifiable; and, therefore, they put from them the ministers and the Gospel of Christ, madly supposing they shall be happier without them. They say unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways *."

How different is the disposition of those, who have a true spiritual discernment! They desire nothing so much as the presence of Christ, and communion with him. Their language is, "When wilt thou come unto me? O make thine abode with me, and let me remain under thy shadow!" The persons, who had been delivered from Satan's influence, were instantly restored to reason and comfort; and they were observed to be "sitting at the feet of Jesus," impressed, no doubt, with unspeakable admiration and gratitude, for the

* Job xxi. 14.

grace beſtowed upon them. They wiſhed to accompany him upon his departure, and ſolicited his permiſſion, "that they might be with him." But he intended them to be the inſtruments of uſefulneſs among the people, who were ſo deeply immerſed in ignorance and ſin. Though he himſelf deſerted the country, he determined to leave theſe his choſen witneſſes there, and therefore ſent them to publiſh throughout their neighbourhood, "what great things the Lord had done for them."

We alſo, conſidering ourſelves alone, may wiſh to be conſtantly ſitting at the feet of Jeſus, under the inſtructions of his mouth, and the light of his countenance. But, for the preſent, he has aſſigned us other work, to which we muſt attend. We muſt bear our teſtimony for him, in the midſt of a dark world, "holding forth the word of life," if not by public preaching, yet by our private converſation, and ſhew in our reſpective places, "what great things he has done for us." Where are thoſe, then, who have ſuch an evidence to give? What have you received at his hands? He yet diſtributes his gifts, and works deliverance for men. Have you experienced his power to ſave? Are you the monuments of his grace? Then commend him to others, and declare to your huſband, wife, parents, or children, what he can accompliſh for them.

Upon his croſſing the lake again, and returning to Galilee, multitudes awaited his arrival, and welcomed him with the livelieſt joy. How different the reception, which he met with in different places! Immediately

ately various applications for relief were made to him, which afforded fresh evidence of his power and compassion *.

It has been repeatedly observed, that few persons of rank paid any regard to Jesus; but distress will sometimes constrain those, who would otherwise be most reluctant, to come to him. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, and therefore of some eminence, under the apprehension of losing his only daughter, about twelve years of age, who appeared in a dying state, represented her case to Jesus, and, with expressions of profound veneration for his character, most earnestly entreated his gracious interposition. Our Lord acceded to his request, and followed him without delay, accompanied by immense crowds, who were desirous to witness the event.

A circumstance occurred by the way, which deserves our notice. A poor diseased woman, who had suffered exceedingly by a bloody flux for twelve years, and had spent her whole substance upon physicians without obtaining relief, heard of the extraordinary works of Jesus, and felt a strong persuasion in her mind, that he had power to heal her. Yet afraid, or ashamed, to describe her situation, she came behind him, and touched the border of his garment, in a believing expectation of a cure. The cure was instantly performed; and such was the change produced within her, as to convince her of its reality. This was entirely concealed from the observation of the people; but Jesus, who was privy to the whole, determined to use the

* Mat. ix. 18—34. Mark v. 22, &c. Luke viii. 41, &c.

woman's

woman's teſtimony, and to acquaint them with it. At firſt, through the tremor of her ſpirits, and an apprehenſion of being reproved for preſumption, ſhe was unwilling to appear; but finding it in vain to hide herſelf, ſhe came forward, and, with many tears, declared the miracle in public. Thus he was pleaſed to manifeſt his own ſupernatural influence, and her humble dependence; and for the encouragement, not of her alone, but of others, he ſaid, "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace."

Here was an inſtance of much weakneſs, mixed with real belief; and hereby we are taught, that Jeſus has compaſſion on our infirmities, and deſpiſes not "the day of ſmall things." Come unto him, you, who have many fears. Come, however hopeleſs your caſe may ſeem. Like this poor woman, you may have ſought relief in vain, for a long ſeaſon: or rather, like her, you may grow worſe and worſe. The reaſon is, your application has hitherto been to "phyſicians of no value." But, turning from all others to Jeſus Chriſt, reach forth your hand, though it be with much trembling, and deſire in faith "to touch him;" and immediately "virtue will go out of him," for the perfecting of your recovery.

Before the ruler of the ſynagogue had reached his own habitation, a freſh trial aroſe, enough to ſhake his confidence. A meſſenger informed him, that his daughter was actually dead, and therefore that it was needleſs for Jeſus to proceed any further. Still however the Saviour, who attended him, encouraged him to believe, and expect her reſtoration. They came at length, to

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the houſe, where great lamentations were made for the beloved child; and ſo unqueſtionable were the marks of her diſſolution, that the intimation of her revival was derided. But Jeſus, to whom "belong the iſſues from death," with a peculiar diſplay of majeſty, called her forth again to life and vigour. The event, ſo confeſſedly miraculous, filled all thoſe, who had obſerved it, with unſpeakable aſtoniſhment; but to avoid oſtentation, or for reaſons of prudence, he requeſted them not to divulge it.

The little narrative conveys much inſtruction to us. We perceive, how uncertain are all human comforts, and are taught to look for painful trials, in our families, as well as in our own perſons. In ſuch circumſtances, may we imitate the conduct of Jairus, and apply to Jeſus for relief! Yet, while we are waiting for his help, it is poſſible, that, for the further exerciſe of our faith, increaſing troubles may come upon us. Then, in an eſpecial manner, we are required to believe; nor is any deliverance too great to be expected from that Jeſus, "who quickeneth the dead."

As he departed thence, two blind men followed him with the moſt importunate cries for relief: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Nor was their petition vain. They were inſtantly reſtored to ſight; and, though charged with ſecreſy, they publiſhed abroad, probably from emotions of the warmeſt gratitude, the kindneſs of their Benefactor.

Immediately afterward, a dumb perſon under a demoniacal poſſeſſion was brought to him, and received a perfect cure at his hands. Well might the people,

overwhelmed

overwhelmed with aſtoniſhment, confeſs, " It was never ſo ſeen in Iſrael." What, then, prevented him from being univerſally acknowledged in his proper character, as the promiſed Redeemer? The Phariſees exerted their influence againſt him, and, though they diſputed not the facts, blaſphemouſly aſcribed them to the agency of Satan. Their malicious cavils had been fully refuted before, and yet they continued to urge the ſame abſurd charges. Juſt ſo, in the preſent day, the weak and profane objections of infidels, which have been repeatedly anſwered, are produced afreſh, and with as much petulance and acrimony as ever. But ſhall not we conclude, from the ſtupendous miracles of Jeſus, that he is " mighty to ſave?" And, ſince his power and grace have ſuffered no diminution, may we not encourage the children of affliction, in all their various diſtreſſes, to commend their caſes to him, and expect ſeaſonable and effectual relief?

After the above-mentioned occurrences, Jeſus returned to Nazareth, the place of his education *. The inhabitants of this city had baſely rejected him already, and even attempted to deſtroy him; yet he did not forſake them, but again delivered his ſolemn inſtructions in their ſynagogue on the ſabbath day. Many of them felt a powerful impreſſion from his preaching. They were aſtoniſhed at his words: but no good effect enſued; for they took offence. Various objections were raiſed, chiefly from his mean extraction, the poverty of his relations, and the low trade, to which he was brought up. They looked for a Meſſiah of high ori-

* Mat. xiii. 54, &c. ix. 35, &c. Mark vi. 1—6.

ginal, invested with worldly honour, pomp, and dominion; and they determined never to receive the man in that exalted character, whom they knew to be destitute of all such attractive distinctions.

Opposition of a similar nature is made among ourselves. The grand doctrines of the Gospel are often treated with scorn, because they are not acceptable to "wise men after the flesh, the mighty, or the noble:" and the truth of Christ is denied, without examination, because some of its advocates possess no eminence of rank or abilities. Prejudices of this kind, though extremely absurd, frequently operate most effectually, and prove destructive. O beware! while you are giving way to captious disputation, Jesus may withdraw. He left Nazareth, and, probably, never more returned. He wrought some miracles among them, and they had credible information of what he performed in other places: but "he did not many mighty works there; nay, HE COULD NOT, because of their unbelief." How fatal the consequences of their obstinate infidelity! It stopped the hand of Jesus, and expelled him from their city. He expressed his astonishment at their perverseness; but he ceased to argue with them. O fear their condemnation, if your minds are ill-affected towards him! While you are raising this or the other objection, he may take his Gospel from you, and send it to another people.

Not discouraged with the persecution at Nazareth, he turned his attention to different towns. He declined not the most arduous exertions, but continued to labour from one city and village to another, declaring

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the good tidings of salvation, and performing unparalleled acts of mercy. Every where he was followed by immense multitudes, on whom he looked with the most compassionate regard. "They fainted," probably with bodily fatigue; but their spiritual state especially, which was most deplorable, excited his tenderest pity. "They were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Their pretended guides were such, as knew not how to direct them, and cared not for their safety. Therefore they wandered in the paths of ignorance and sin, which would infallibly lead them to destruction. Alas! what could be done for them? They discovered an earnest desire to be instructed in the word of life; but there were few to teach it. He exhorted his disciples, then, to offer up fervent prayer, that God would "give them pastors according to his own heart." Their serious attendance upon his ministry, in such large numbers, was like the promising appearances of the fields, which denoted a plentiful harvest; but labourers were wanted to reap and gather in the valuable produce. And to whom should application be made, but to the great Proprietor, who must be concerned for the event? Petitions, therefore, should be addressed to him, to supply the deficiency, that, by a suitable provision of diligent and faithful men, the rich fruit may be secured for himself, and precious souls no longer "destroyed for lack of knowledge."

Such a tender regard for the spiritual and everlasting happiness of the human race was a distinguishing feature in the character of Jesus. This, and this alone, is true benevolence. Where are those, who feel the same

generous principle, the ſame ardent deſire to promote the ſalvation of ſinners? You, then, will rejoice to ſee the multitudes of poor, ignorant perſons, who flock to hear the Goſpel preached with plainneſs and fidelity. Yet you will lament, that ſo few, even of thoſe whoſe office demands it of them, labour with aſſiduity to ſave immortal creatures from deſtruction. Much of the harveſt ſeems likely to be loſt, for want of proper aſſiſtance to collect it. O what fervent prayer ſhould you preſent to God on this account! Pray, that He himſelf would ſend forth his ſervants, endued with all ſuitable abilities to do his work. He muſt ordain them to their high function; and He alone can aſſiſt and proſper them. Thouſands, alas! among us, are "ſcattered abroad, as ſheep having no ſhepherd." If ſuch be your wretched caſe, be thankful that there are any, who are "moved with compaſſion on you," and who "watch for your ſouls." They deſire to recover you from your wandering ſtate, to bring you back to the fold of Chriſt, and to lead you into his "green paſtures," where are ſafety and refreſhment. Be willing to follow their directions; and, whatever difficulties they may ſuffer from other quarters, let them meet with no oppoſition from you, ſince it is your ſalvation for which they labour inceſſantly. You have been "as ſheep going aſtray;" O "return unto the Shepherd and Biſhop of your ſouls*!"

* 1 Pet. ii. 25.

SECT. 19.

Jesus sent forth his twelve Apostles, with miraculous powers, and gave them a solemn charge, for their direction and encouragement.

One principal purpose of our Lord's ministry was to propagate divine truth, and, in particular, to declare and explain the appointed way of access unto God. But, as his public life was so short, and his labours met with so many obstructions, it became expedient to select some faithful men, furnished with proper instructions, to assist him in the work. He had already separated twelve persons out of his constant attendants, who were to observe his directions, and to be employed as chief officers in his Church. He had gradually prepared and fitted them for the apostolic function: but hitherto they had acted only under his immediate notice; and now, for the first time, he proceeded to send them out upon a circuit by themselves *.

" No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God †." The chosen witnesses of

* Mat. x. 1, &c. xi. 1. Mark vi. 7—13. Luke ix. 1—6.

† Heb. v. 4.

Jesus

Jesus did not obtrude themselves upon him, but waited his summons. He, the great Lord of the harvest, appoints his labourers to their respective posts. When he had assembled them together, in order to deliver their sacred commission to them, he endowed them with miraculous powers, by which, as unquestionable credentials, they might recommend their doctrine, and demonstrate its truth. They were enabled, with a word, to cast out devils, and to cure the most inveterate diseases.

We offer no remarks, in this place, on the names, characters, and connections of the Apostles, observing only in general, that we need not enquire any other reason for their selection, than the sovereign will and pleasure of the Lord himself. "Ye have not chosen me," said he, "but I have chosen you *." And therefore to the most eminent of them the question might be put, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive †?"

Before their departure, like a tender father concerned for the welfare of his children, whom he is sending out into the world, foreseeing difficulties, snares, and dangers, he instructed, he warned, he encouraged them, with much solemnity and affection. He directed them to go in pairs, "by two and two," that they might afford mutual support and comfort to each other. At first, their commission was subject to certain limitations. They were to address themselves only to the house of Israel; nor were they empowered to offer sal-

* John xv. 16. † 1 Cor. iv. 7.

vation

vation to any other people, till his final ſeparation from them. This was a peculiar honour and favour beſtowed upon the Jews: but alas! how little were they ſenſible of the privilege! " They knew not the time of their viſitation." Do you aſk the reaſon of this marked diſtinction, or accuſe the Saviour of partiality in the diſtribution of his bleſſings? He is not accountable to you for any of his matters. He has an indubitable right to do what He will with his own; and therefore to ſend, or to withhold, his Goſpel, as He pleaſeth.

But what was the grand object of the embaſſy of the Apoſtles? Hear the purport of their inſtructions; " As heralds, proclaim, with a loud voice, and with all the zeal and courage, which ſuch a cauſe demands, that God is now viſiting his people in mercy, and about to ſet up the promiſed kingdom of the Redeemer. In atteſtation of your ſacred commiſſion, and of the truth of your doctrine, to prove alſo that your miniſtry is deſigned to anſwer the moſt gracious and benevolent purpoſes, exert the miraculous powers now intruſted to you, as opportunity ſhall be given, for the relief of the diſtreſſed, and not for your own private emolument, which you muſt cheerfully renounce."

From this part of the charge, how excellent does the religion of Jeſus appear! It brings the moſt reviving intelligence, as it " proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord." It propoſes bleſſings the moſt valuable, repreſented by thoſe ſupernatural cures which the Apoſtles wrought and diſpenſed freely, " without money and without price," where no recompenſe can be expected. Shall we not rejoice, that " the king-

dom of heaven" is come unto us? Or ſhall we heſitate to receive the gracious declarations of theſe primitive heralds, who exhibited inconteſtable evidence, that they were no other than ambaſſadors from God? We are aſſured, that in crediting their meſſage we "follow not cunningly deviſed fables," while we perceive, that "God bore them witneſs both with ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, according to his own will *." We are thankful, that their commiſſion, at firſt ſo circumſcribed, was afterwards enlarged, and that they were commanded to "go into all the world, and preach the Goſpel to every creature †." Otherwiſe, how would the bleſſing have been extended to us? But praiſed be God, He hath ſent his word to the Gentiles, and "granted to them alſo repentance unto life ‡."

Imagine the twelve ſtanding round their Lord, to receive the law at his mouth, while he proceeds in his addreſs, and gives them directions for their conduct. As they were totally unfurniſhed for their intended expedition, and without any viſible means of ſubſiſtence, it is probable, that anxious thoughts might ariſe in their minds, about obtaining the neceſſary ſupplies. But thus the Saviour inſtructed them; "Of that kind of proviſion, which men generally make for a journey, you will have no need. Nay, you are forbidden to take ſuch things with you, as perhaps you might procure, and prudence might ſeem to require. You are to expect your conſtant ſupport from that God, in whoſe cauſe you go forth. "Upon Him," therefore, "caſt all your care,

* Heb. ii. 4. † Mark xvi. 15. ‡ Acts xi. 18.

for

for he careth for you;" nor doubt that his providence will ſuſtain you, though it ſhould be in an extraordinary way. Some will be diſpoſed to ſhew you kindneſs; and you ſhould not ſcruple to accept your proper maintenance at the hands of thoſe, for whom you labour."

"Upon your firſt entrance into a town, enquire for ſuch perſons, as are of the beſt character. With them abide, if they are willing to receive you; nor leave them in fickleneſs or diſguſt, whatever your accommodations may be; for you ought not to be ſolicitous about matters ſo trifling, as mere convenience. When you are admitted into their houſes, pay them all due courteſy and reſpect; and, as the miniſters of peace, expreſs your good wiſhes for their peace and comfort. The benediction, which you ſolemnly pronounce, ſhall reſt upon thoſe families, which are well-affected to my Goſpel; but it will not profit ſuch, as continue in unbelief. Your prayers, however, though ineffectual for others, will not be loſt; for they ſhall bring down the bleſſing of God upon your own heads. A tremendous wo awaits thoſe, who obſtinately reject you; and, while you depart from them, you may intimate their awful ſtate, by ſhaking off the duſt of your feet, and thus repreſenting the very place as utterly defiled and devoted to deſtruction. In the grand, the deciſive day of judgment, thoſe, who have refuſed to obey the word of my grace, ſhall periſh with more aggravated ruin, than even Sodom and Gomorrah, under the vengeance of Almighty God."

In

In this addrefs we difcover fome difcriminating marks of the faithful preachers of the Gofpel in every age. May God raife up among ourfelves men of this defcription, to teftify "the truth, as it is in Jefus!" It becomes them not to be anxious for their own temporal fupport, much lefs to covet worldly dignities or fenfual indulgences. While they carry with them a meffage of peace and love, they fhould prove, by the kindnefs of their deportment, that they wifh to promote the happinefs of all. Yet, in perfect confiftence with this meeknefs, they fhould poffefs fuch courage and fidelity, as "to declare all the counfel of God," and folemnly to warn contemptuous finners of impending deftruction. Is the duty of minifters allowed? But do you, to whom they come, confider alfo, what you owe to them and their doctrine? Do you honour their office? Do you ferioufly regard their exhortations? Poffibly, a bold and unreferved declaration of the truth may excite your difguft, and draw forth the hidden corruptions of your hearts: at leaft, it will evince your real difpofitions. O beware! Thofe, who long for your falvation, muft admonifh you, that you do not, by a fcornful rejection of them, bring upon yourfelves certain and aggravated condemnation. Though they do not rank themfelves with the Apoftles, yet the Gofpel, which they preach, has loft nothing of its importance or obligation by the courfe of time; and the God of heaven is as much concerned now, as ever, to vindicate its honour. Moft affuredly, therefore, though "the men of Sodom were finners before the Lord exceedingly,"

ceedingly *," yet, if you refuse or "neglect so great salvation," your guilt is more heinous than their's, and your everlasting misery will be far more insupportable.

The Apostles had nothing but violent opposition to expect, from the wickedness of the world, or, rather, from the corruption of human nature. Their gracious Master, therefore, prepared them for it, suggesting, at the same time, various considerations to encourage their hopes, and invigorate their zeal. He proceeded, in a most affecting manner, to the following purpose:

"Though you are going forth at my command, in my name, and under my protection, you will not be exempt from enemies. You are to be meek and inoffensive; but you will be surrounded by those, who, being of furious dispositions, may endeavour to harass and devour you. It may be right to use every precaution, which prudence may dictate, for your own preservation; but beware of "rendering evil for evil;" and learn, rather, to "suffer long and be kind."

"Knowing the general depravity of men, trust not yourselves in their hands, but be prepared to meet with bitter persecution from them, for your attachment to me. With a shew of justice, they will bring you to trial in their courts, and condemn you to the most painful tortures, as the worst of criminals. In this manner, you may have occasion to stand before the great men of the earth, and you will embrace the opportunity, to bear witness of me and of my salvation, which otherwise they might not hear of. Such an attestation will be an honour to you, and may prove the

* Gen. xiii. 13.

means

means of ſpiritual benefit to them. Are you diſcouraged by an apprehenſion, that you ſhall not be able to ſpeak, as you ought, in your own juſtification, before ſuch auditors? You ſhall be inſpired with wiſdom from above; and it ſhall be immediately ſuggeſted by the Holy Ghoſt, what you ſhould advance in vindication of yourſelves and the Goſpel."

"Nor ſhall your enemies be thoſe only, whoſe regard you have no peculiar claim to, but even your neareſt relatives in life will riſe up with furious and murderous rage againſt you. Brethren, parents, and children, will break through the ties of natural affection, while they are oppoſing, and endeavouring to deſtroy, each other from a hatred of the truth. Such a bitterneſs of perſecution you will meet with in every place, on account of your cordial regard to me, that you will be held up as the objects of univerſal deteſtation. But maintain your integrity and your firmneſs in the faith, without wavering; and whatever you may ſuffer by the way, the end will bring a glorious recompenſe."

"Reſiſtance may drive you from one city, but immediately carry your meſſage to another. Enough remains to be done, nor will you complete your progreſs through the various parts of Judea, till I appear, in awful viſitation, to vindicate my cauſe againſt its opponents."

"Are you ſurpriſed or ſtaggered at being called out to ſuch painful trials? Remember, what I, your Lord and Maſter, have to endure, and what vile reproaches are caſt upon my name: and be content, that your treatment in the world ſhould reſemble mine. Let not

your adverſaries terrify or diſcourage you; for the day is at hand, when their malignity and your integrity ſhall be clearly exhibited, and all theſe dark diſpenſations unfolded to your view. In the mean time, keep back nothing through fear or reſerve; but faithfully and publicly proclaim aloud whatever I have revealed to you in ſecret. Let them condemn you to the ſevereſt tortures: you know the utmoſt that their malicious rage can inflict. They may deſtroy the life of the body; but the ſoul, which is the nobler part, is removed far beyond their reach; ſo that, though the unanimated fleſh be ſoon reduced to its original duſt, the immortal ſpirit will remain in perfect vigour. But, oh! dread the thought of coming under the indignation of your Almighty Sovereign, whoſe power extends to another world, and who can render you completely miſerable, both in body and ſoul, and that throughout all eternity."

"Be not diſtreſſed by the apprehenſion of ſuch calamitous events, as may await you here. The God of heaven and earth, whoſe immediate charge you are, cannot forget or deſert you. He exerciſes an univerſal providence; ſo that he marks and determines the ſituation of every creature, though ever ſo ſmall or worthleſs, and diſpoſes all their circumſtances, as He pleaſes. You, therefore, who are in a peculiar manner the objects of his care, and moſt valuable in his eſteem, may cheerfully confide in his protection. He knows and over-rules your minuteſt concerns, and on this ground you ſhould poſſeſs an unſhaken fortitude in his ſervice."

"Are

"Are you, then, bold and faithful in your profeſſion and defence of my truth? You ſhall be glorioully diſtinguiſhed as my beloved friends, and receive a public approbation and a high recompenſe of reward, in the preſence of my heavenly Father. But thoſe, who, through ſhame, cowardice, or any worldly regards, ſhrink from that open declaration of attachment to me, and from thoſe exertions of duty, which my Goſpel requires, ſhall be diſowned and rejected with everlaſting abhorrence, for the baſeneſs and malignity of their conduct."

"You may have expected much outward proſperity and peace from the coming of the Meſſiah, and the eſtabliſhment of his kingdom; but the real conſequence will be directly contrary. Though the tendency of my religion be moſt excellent, yet, through the corruption of man oppoſing it, all manner of confuſion and violence will enſue. The fierceſt contentions between the neareſt relatives will take place; ſo that none, probably, will be ſo incenſed againſt my faithful ſervants, as thoſe, who may dwell in the ſame family, and are connected with them by the cloſeſt bonds of friendſhip and of kindred."

"It is neceſſary, then, that you ſhould be prepared for the moſt painful ſeparation. If there be any one, even parent or child, whoſe favour you prefer to mine, you can have no proper ſenſe of my worth or of my claims upon you; nor can you poſſeſs any part in my ſalvation. You muſt be willing to ſacrifice your eaſe, your reputation, and ſecular intereſts, for my ſake and the Goſpel's, and reſolutely ſubmit to all hardſhips and indignities.

indignities. I, your Leader and Commander, go before you, and therefore you ſhould not heſitate to follow me, through much tribulation. Perhaps, a violent death may cloſe your ſufferings here. Be it ſo. Thoſe, who apoſtatize from me may lengthen out their exiſtence upon earth a few days longer; but they ſhall be deſtroyed for ever: while you, who may ſhed your blood in my cauſe and ſervice, ſhall live and reign, beyond the reach of perſecutors, in everlaſting happineſs and glory. This is enough, ſurely, to fix your determination, and inſpire you with increaſing confidence and zeal."

"You will ſuſtain an important character; nor is it a matter of indifference, how you are treated in the world. I ſolemnly declare, that whatever kindneſs is ſhewn unto you, while you are acting in my name, it ſhall be conſidered as a mark of unfeigned regard to me and my Father; for you go forth as our repreſentatives and ambaſſadors. He, who ſhall cordially receive my prophets or miniſters for the ſake of that Goſpel, which they preach, or even any faithful diſciples in private life, from a pure, diſintereſted reſpect to their character, ſhall be abundantly repaid for his pious liberality towards them: he ſhall partake with them of that bliſs and glory, to which they ſhall ſhortly be admitted."

"I commend you, therefore, as my dear children, to the notice of all who are concerned for my cauſe. If any one ſhall afford you the leaſt attention or refreſhment by the way, adminiſtering only a cup of cold water for your relief, becauſe you belong to me and are employed in my ſervice, I pledge myſelf to return

that act of kindness in an ample manner. I will not forget, but publicly own, approve, and reward, the labours of love, which shall be wrought for my name's sake."

Such was the purport of our Lord's most affecting address to his twelve Apostles, when he sent them forth to evangelize the land. Such tender and earnest wishes did he express for their encouragement, support, and success in their arduous work. Having received their commission and the solemn charge, they proceeded, as they were directed, on the momentous expedition. They carried with them from place to place the gracious overtures of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and called upon all, without exception, to humble themselves before him under a conviction of their guilt, and to turn from their evil ways with sincere contrition and renovation of heart. Nor did Jesus himself cease from his own vigorous exertions. He continued to bear part of the burden, and persevered in his progress, that he might diffuse the knowledge of salvation all around.

While we contemplate the office and character of the Apostles, as here exhibited, we are furnished with strong arguments for the authenticity and salutary tendency of the Gospel. Such a plan could never be the contrivance of men: it must be "the power of God, and the wisdom of God *." It is also so replete with blessings, calculated to relieve our wretchedness, that we need not hesitate to pronounce it "worthy of all acceptation †." The subject will likewise lead us, as

* 1 Cor. i. 24. † 1 Tim. i. 15.

we have already intimated, to consider what manner of persons they ought to be, in modern times, who are "the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." The case of these primitive ambassadors was, in many respects, peculiar. But all those, surely, to whom "the word of reconciliation is committed;" should possess the same views and dispositions, which were required in them.

We may carry the application farther, and remark; that the holy and heavenly tempers, here inculcated, are indispensably necessary, not merely for those who preach, but for those who profess, the Gospel. Though you be not invested with a public office in the Church of Christ, yet, as called by his name, you should be meek, gentle, and inoffensive. You must be willing to bear the most ignominious and scornful treatment, for the sake of your Lord and Master. You must cheerfully submit to the heaviest calamities, in the way of duty, without distrusting the providence of God; and, in every possible situation, avow your attachment to Christ, whatever painful consequences you may suffer. You can never be at liberty to deny him, though your most beloved friends, or those, on whom you depend for sustenance, should require you to do it. Let father and mother, wife and children be dear to you, as they ought to be; but let Jesus be dearer than all. He claims, and he deserves, your cordial and supreme regard. You do not, therefore, understand his excellency, or your obligations to him, unless you prefer his favour and the advancement of his glory to every worldly possession or enjoyment, unless you can give

up your neareſt kindred, your reputation, emolument, eaſe, or life itſelf, for his ſake, whenever they come in competition.

Where, then, ſhall we find ſuch love to the Saviour, ſuch zeal for his name? It is evident, that many are totally deſtitute of theſe holy principles. Are there not thoſe, who are enſlaved to ſenſual pleaſures, and determined, as far as poſſible, to gratify every inclination of their hearts? And to what purpoſe ſhould we inculcate upon Them the neceſſity of taking up the croſs, and following Jeſus? They would turn away their ears in contempt or indignation. Yet we muſt declare the offenſive truth, that "the luſt of the fleſh, the luſt of the eyes, and the pride of life," are as inconſiſtent with real Chriſtianity now, as they were in primitive times. "Whoſoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God *."

Is it ſufficient to aſſume expreſſions of reſpect, and, with demure appearance, upon your bended knees, to pretend a high regard for the Saviour, while you are afraid to advance one ſtep farther in his ſervice, than may be agreeable to the general maxims and cuſtoms of the place in which you live? Does he not account ſuch compliments an inſult, more odious to him, than an avowed oppoſition? This temporizing ſpirit is as fooliſh, as it is ſinful: it pleads prudence, but it tends to deſtruction. You may contrive to avoid perſecution, and procure applauſe and preferment among men; but what will theſe avail, if Jeſus diſown you? What ſhame, confuſion, and horror will overwhelm you, when

* James iv. 4.

convicted, before the aſſembled univerſe, of treating him with inſolent contempt!

May we all, therefore, be perſuaded to follow him, wherever he ſhall lead, and to undergo all extremities in his ſervice! Why ſuch a regard to preſent conveniences? Why ſuch fear of our fellow-creatures, and diſtruſt of God? Do not theſe things argue much unbelief, and betray an earthly mind? Let us riſe above our little difficulties, and confide in that God, who takes care for the very ſparrows, and hath numbered the hairs of our heads. He will not be inattentive to our wants, even in this life, if we be faithful to him: and a glorious reward is laid up in heaven for thoſe, who are willing to hazard every conſequence, from a zealous adherence to his cauſe. Relying on his promiſe, may we now ſurrender ourſelves, and our all to him! Then ſhall we ſtand with confidence and joy before him, at the great day of his appearing. Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 20.

Jesus, on the return of his Apostles, withdrew with them —fed five thousand by a miracle—retired from the multitude—walked on the sea—stilled the tempest—taught in the synagogue at Capernaum—cavilled at by the Jews, and forsaken by many disciples.

As we advance in the prosecution of our design, and contemplate the wonderful acts of the Son of man, we meet with additional proofs of his high dignity, and the perfection of his character. If we fix our attentive regard on this bright Luminary, such beams of glory will break forth upon us, as will fill, and almost overpower, the soul with admiration of his excellency.

When the Apostles returned from the circuit, on which they were sent, they brought back to their Lord an account of their ministry, of the miracles they had performed, and the doctrines they had taught *. Immediately he withdrew with them to a solitary place, that they might be relieved from their fatigue, and, probably, that they might retire for the purposes of devotion. This was the more necessary, as the vast crowds of

* Mat. xiv. 13, &c. Mark vi. 30, &c. Luke ix. 10, &c. John vi. 1, &c.

of people allowed them no leiſure. It is expedient for all, eſpecially for thoſe who are actively employed in the ſacred functions of religion, to ſecure ſome moments to themſelves, by retreating from their public engagements, that both their minds and bodies may be recruited.

To obtain the deſired privacy, he paſſed over a part of the ſea of Galilee; and great multitudes, who had obſerved his departure, followed him with much eagerneſs, "becauſe they ſaw his miracles." They were induced to attend him, with reſpect to many we fear, by no better motives than curioſity or aſtoniſhment. The compaſſionate Jeſus, however, upon coming to the ſhore, where they were ready to receive him, could not look upon them without feeling the moſt tender concern for their ſtate, remarking, as he had done on a former occaſion, that "they were as ſheep not having a ſhepherd." On this account, foregoing his intended reſt, he began to renew his labours, and went up with them to a mountain, that he might be heard with convenience: there he opened the nature of his kingdom, and manifeſted his power, by reſtoring health and vigour to them that were diſeaſed. Bleſſed Jeſus! we beſeech thee ſtill to look with pity "on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." How immenſe are their numbers, and how wretched is their condition! Stretch out thine arm to recover them from the paths of error, and reveal thy glories to them. Inſtruct them in thy truth, and take them into thy fold, as the ſheep of thy paſture.

At the cloſe of the day, the diſciples having no ſtock

of provisions, would have dismissed the people. But Jesus, unwilling to send them away without refreshment, proposed a distribution of the food, which was at hand. Accordingly, at his word preparations were made for the wondrous entertainment. They were all marshalled in ranks, and seated in the open air upon the grass. But whence shall a sufficient quantity of meat be procured for so large a multitude; as there were present five thousand men, beside women and children? This was, indeed, a severe trial of the faith of his disciples, who were able to produce no greater store than five loaves and two small fishes. These, however, were brought forth, and, in the hands of Jesus, by an all-creating power, they were so multiplied, as to be more than enough to satisfy the whole company. "They did all eat, and were filled;" and, when the fragments were collected, it was found that such had been the miraculous increase, that the remainder far exceeded the original provisions.

What a grandeur do we perceive in this entertainment, surpassing that which attends the most sumptuous tables of princes! What a fervour of devotion appeared in the great Master of the feast, while he looked up in prayer for the divine blessing, and taught the people to expect their food from Heaven! What an exalted majesty, mixed with the kindest condescension, distinguished his behaviour! Was not every one, then, struck with admiration, and disposed to revere and love him? They concluded without hesitation, and they concluded rightly, "This is of a truth that Prophet, that should come into the world."

Do

Do we draw the ſame inference? There are ſtrong and convincing reaſons, which ſhould lead us to it. When we compare the ancient predictions of the Meſſiah with the various parts of the life and character of Jeſus, we muſt allow their accompliſhment in him, and maintain that he is indeed the promiſed Saviour. Yet it is poſſible, that the evidence may conſtrain us to aſſent to the fact, even while we refuſe to give to this Prophet that regard, which his high office demands from us. Are we, then, with profound veneration, ſitting at his feet, and looking to him for inſtruction? Do we underſtand, or credit, the meſſage which he has brought from heaven? Are we not ſtrangely perverſe and infatuated, if we acknowledge him to be the Teacher of Iſrael, the Chriſt of God, and yet remain unconcerned about his doctrine? Either ſay at once, He is a baſe impoſtor, which few will dare to aſſert; or elſe, bow with unfeigned ſubmiſſion to him, and pray, "Shew me thy ways, O Lord, and teach me thy paths. Make known to me the glorious truths of thy ſalvation; and ſpeak effectually to my heart, for thy ſervant heareth."

Or, allowing his ſacred character, are we afraid to follow him? The miracle, we have conſidered, is calculated to fix and confirm our dependence upon him, as able to provide for our ſupport, and exerciſing a tender care for our bodies as well as ſouls. If we are ever ſo neceſſitous, we perceive with what eaſe he can multiply our ſtore. In a thouſand ways, which we cannot foreſee, he can furniſh our tables with plenty. This very inſtruction was meant to be conveyed to us; and

and accordingly, the diſciples were afterwards reproved for not remembering the extraordinary occurrence to better purpoſe, when they were apprehenſive of wanting bread to eat *. Let us learn, then, to "caſt all our care upon him," believing that he will "feed us with food convenient for us."

The aſtoniſhed multitude, concluding him to be the Meſſiah, and expecting, agreeably to their carnal notions, that he would ſet up a temporal dominion, were deſirous immediately to inveſt him with regal honours. But, ſo far from entertaining any ambitious deſigns, or diſcovering any oſtentation, he took pains to avoid public notice and applauſe. He now withdrew from them in haſte. He directed his diſciples, alſo, to depart, and to croſs the lake to Bethſaida: perhaps he was anxious to prevent them from favouring the fooliſh wiſhes of the people. In the mean time he himſelf retired to a mountain for prayer, and ſpent the chief part of the night in his private devotions. Ah! how unlike to him are thoſe of his profeſſed followers, who are ſolicitous to procure and preſerve the pomp and power of this preſent world! Or, what reſemblance to the holy Jeſus do thoſe bear, who have no reliſh for religious ſolitude, and can ſpare no time for the exalted purpoſe of maintaining communion with God?

The diſciples were on the ſea, where they were overtaken by a ſtorm, and toſſed about, for many hours together, upon the boiſterous waves. Their ſituation was diſtreſſing; the night was dark, the water

* Mat. xvi. 9.

tempeſtuous, the wind violent and contrary: they had ſpent their ſtrength in vain with rowing; dangers threatened them; and their dear Lord and Maſter was abſent. Jeſus, however, could not be unmindful of them: he knew their difficulties, and drew near for their help. He had been retired till near the morning; when he came to them "walking upon the ſea." How did he convince them of their ſafety under his protection! How did he encourage them to face every ſtorm in his ſervice, while they ſaw the deep itſelf at his command.

So ſtrange was the ſight, that, as they imagined it was not poſſible for a real human body to be ſupported by the waves, they concluded it was an apparition, and gave way to perplexing fears. But he, to relieve them from their diſtreſs, graciouſly revealed himſelf, ſaying, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." This was enough. The ſound of his voice, ſpeaking comfort in ſuch awful circumſtances, revived and cheered their hearts. Peter ſuppoſed, that he alſo ſhould be able to walk on the boiſterous ſea, if his Lord would permit him to attempt it. The leave, which he raſhly ſolicited, was granted, that his forwardneſs might be checked, by a ſad proof of the weakneſs of his principles. When he felt the violence of the ſtorm, his faith failed, and he began to ſink; ſo that, if Jeſus had not ſtretched out his compaſſionate hand to ſave him, he muſt have periſhed in the deep.

Jeſus then entered the veſſel, and reſtored peace and comfort to his diſciples. Immediately, the rage of the

wind

wind abated, and they were brought to the very point of land, which they aimed at. What proofs of power; what marks of dignity were here! Yet what modesty and condescension appeared in our Lord's constant deportment! He did not display his ability in an ostentatious manner, or even for his own accommodation. He submitted to travel on foot, with much fatigue, when he could have instantly transported himself to the most distant place. His attendants were filled with inexpressible astonishment, and the more so, as they had not duly considered the miracle of the preceding day. They fell down before him, with the strongest emotions of gratitude and love, and with expressions of profound adoration, crying out, " Of a truth, thou art the Son of God." The inhabitants, also, of the neighbouring coasts no sooner received intelligence of him, than they flocked after him with great eagerness, entreating his compassion toward the sick; and, merely by the touch of his garment, the most inveterate diseases were removed.

Shall not We, likewise, be encouraged to apply to him, who has all power in his hand, and who, in so many instances, has proved himself " mighty to save?" Our faith may be tried, as that of his disciples was, and, probably, our weakness will soon be evinced. " Lord, help our unbelief." He is often pleased to suffer a violent storm to arise, and his people may seem as if they were left alone upon the deep, toiling in extreme distress, ready to perish. But he will graciously interpose, in due season, to save them. He will mani-

fest himſelf to them, appeaſe the rage of the tempeſt, quiet their fears, and "bring them unto their deſired haven." "Oh, that men would praiſe the Lord for his goodneſs, and for his wonderful works to the children of men *!"

The multitude, who had been deſirous that Jeſus ſhould aſſume the government, and from whom he had withdrawn, ſought after him again with renewed ardour. They had travelled far on foot, and then they croſſed the lake in ſearch of him. At length, they found him in the ſynagogue at Capernaum, and, after expreſſing their ſurpriſe at his removal to that place, which they could not account for, they received a ſolemn reproof for the low and carnal motives, upon which they followed him. The miraculous entertainment, he had afforded them, raiſed their expectations of his poſſeſſing a temporal dominion, and they were ſtill in hopes of exalting and enriching themſelves by his ſervice. A poor reaſon indeed, for pretending an attachment to Jeſus! Yet, we fear, a regard to ſecular advantages has been the ground of much of that religious zeal, which has been admired in the world. But it is a mean and contemptible principle. He called upon them, therefore, to turn their attention from the care of the periſhable body to that of the immortal ſoul, and to employ their utmoſt eagerneſs and diligence for the attainment of thoſe bleſſings, which would remain for ever. He declared, alſo, that he

* Pſal. cvii. 30, 31.

himſelf, as "the Son of man," had received a commiſſion from God the Father, freely to beſtow this eternal happineſs and glory.

They profeſſed an earneſt deſire to do the will of God; and therefore our Lord aſſerted the neceſſity of believing on the Saviour, as a duty indiſpenſably requiſite above all others, the grand injunction of the new diſpenſation, and the appointed method of acceptance with God. His words implied, that he was the Chriſt, whom they ſhould receive. Yet many of them were unwilling to admit his claims, and inſolently demanded his credentials, as if he had already exhibited none, which deſerved regard. He had performed various miracles in their neighbourhood, of which they muſt have had authentic information; and their own eyes had ſeen unqueſtionable proofs of his divine miſſion: and ſtill they preſumed to aſk, "What doſt thou work?" Unbelief is always unreaſonable: it cavils at the plaineſt teſtimonies, and determines never to be ſatisfied. We need not, therefore, be ſurpriſed at the outcry for ſtronger evidence, as it is generally made by thoſe whom no evidence will convince.

It was intimated to Jeſus, that his miracles were far inferior to thoſe of Moſes, who had fully demonſtrated his ſacred character and legation, by ſupporting their anceſtors in the wilderneſs with manna from heaven. He replied, that the Lord God was then diſpenſing to them bread infinitely more excellent, than that which Moſes had been the means of communicating, and that this bread was no other than the very Perſon,

who

who had defcended from the higheft heavens, for the purpofe of giving life to a perifhing world. The extraordinary and important declaration, probably, impreffed the minds of fome of his audience, and conftrained them to cry out, though they comprehended not the full import of their own words, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." There cannot be a more fuitable petition for ourfelves to offer up: only let us underftand and feel its meaning. Who is not anxious to preferve life? What immenfe pains are taken to procure that fuftenance, which merely fupports the body! And fhall we not be folicitous to gain a happy exiftence beyond the grave? Are we told, that God has gracioufly made provifion for this very end, in the Gofpel of his Son? And fhall we not, inftead of proudly and petulantly quarrelling with it, ferioufly enquire into its nature, and the method, in which the benefit may be conveyed? Such a difpofition, furely, becomes our character and fituation. Let us hear, then, the further inftructions of Jefus on this moft interefting fubject.

He declared explicitly, and without referve, that He himfelf is that fpiritual food, on which our everlafting falvation depends, that by faith alone the bleffing is obtained, and that the believer, in a fincere application to him, fhall be delivered from thofe carnal defires, which can never be fatisfied, and fhall find his foul contented and delighted in him. Still he obferved, that many of thofe, who then faw him with their eyes, and had the beft opportunity of examining his pretenfions,

pretenſions, contemptuouſly rejected the gracious offer. How ſhall this be accounted for? The true reaſon is aſſigned by our Lord. In our fallen and depraved ſtate, ſuch is our natural blindneſs, pride, and love of the world, that we are all unwilling to accept the ſalvation provided, by ſubmitting to Jeſus, and fixing our whole reliance upon him. Yet, that the glorious plan of redemption may not be defeated by our folly and perverſeneſs, God hath ſecured a people for himſelf by his own Covenant; and theſe, under the ſtrong influence of his Spirit, abandon their oppoſition to Jeſus, and bow before him with an unreſerved ſubjection, thankful to partake of mercy in the appointed way. We adore that power, which hath wrought effectually in all them that believe. While we admire the change, we confeſs and praiſe the free and ſovereign grace of our God, which hath produced it.

But, leſt this high and myſterious doctrine ſhould be abuſed, or any humble penitents be diſcouraged, Jeſus alſo declared his readineſs to receive the applications of all who come, in all poſſible circumſtances, and ſolemnly pledged his word, that no objection whatever ſhould prevail againſt them. This he confirmed, by remarking, that the final ſalvation of his people was the very end, for which he had left the glory of heaven, and that it was alſo the grand object of his Father's counſels. On this ground he inſtructed them to expect from him the completion of their happineſs in an everlaſting ſtate, and promiſed again and again, that, though their bodies muſt go down to the

duſt,

duſt, the grave ſhould not detain them for ever, but that his arm would reſcue them from death at the laſt day. Will not theſe aſſurances ſuffice us? Jeſus poſſeſſes all fulneſs of grace for the recovery of them that are loſt. The invitation is ſent to all without exception; the offer is freely made to thoſe, who ſincerely deſire it; and all obſtructions are removed, but thoſe, which ſinners themſelves obſtinately continue to throw in the way. What more do you wiſh for, than a favourable acceptance? Why, then, do you remain at a diſtance from him, ſince he bids you to draw nigh, and engages to give you a cordial welcome? There is no decree, which can exclude you from his mercy, if only you will ſubmit to his propoſals. His hand is ſtretched out to communicate his bleſſings; and his bowels yearn with compaſſion toward every poor ſupplicant, who is humbled at his feet.

Jeſus having ſpoken in high terms of his deſcent from heaven, and of the benefits to be derived from himſelf, the Jews, who were not acquainted with his divine extraction, and ſuppoſed him to be no more than the ſon of Joſeph, his reputed father, began to cavil at his expreſſions. To ſilence their objections, and turn their attention to themſelves, he replied to the following effect:

" Inſtead of indulging a captious diſpoſition, ſeriouſly conſider your own awful circumſtances, and implore direction and aſſiſtance from above. For ſuch is the natural ignorance and perverſeneſs of man in his fallen ſtate, that he cannot be induced to ſeek or accept ſalvation in my name, but by the powerful opera-

tion of God upon his mind. Your own prophets have instructed you to ask and expect this very influence; and every one, who has obtained it, will acknowledge my claims, and yield me an unfeigned submission. In this way only my blessings are to be secured. Mistake me not, as if the Father would manifest himself in a visible manner: He speaks to you by him, who is come from his immediate presence; and I, his faithful witness, declare with the most solemn and repeated asseverations, that he, who places his whole affiance upon me, is received into the divine favour, and possesses a sure title to eternal happiness."

"I am, therefore, that bread, which alone can afford true sustenance to your souls. How far superior to the manna, by which your ancestors were supported! That was the means of preserving their existence in this world, only for a short season: whereas the spiritual food, which I propose, will effectually secure you from perishing for ever. I myself am that food, of which the manna was a faint and imperfect representation: I came down from the highest heavens to communicate everlasting life to all those, throughout the whole world, who by faith shall partake of the sacred provision. For this very purpose, I have assumed a human body, which I shall shortly offer up as an expiatory sacrifice, to rescue sinners from deserved ruin, and procure for them the possession of endless felicity."

Declarations so strong, so new, and mysterious, excited various sentiments in the minds of the Jews, who, therefore, began to dispute with each other con-

cerning them. Through their carnal and perverſe diſpoſitions they could not comprehend, how Jeſus could "give them his fleſh to eat." Probably, moſt of them were diſpoſed to deride the doctrine as altogether abſurd. But he proceeded to confirm it by the moſt expreſs and vehement aſſertions, without deigning to anſwer every cavil, which a proud objector might bring.

"However you may ſcorn the warning, I ſolemnly aſſure you, that you are totally deſtitute of real, ſpiritual life, unleſs you be quickened by believing on the Son of man, as ſuffering and dying for you *. He fur-

* It would be doing the utmoſt violence to language to explain our Lord's expreſſions in any other ſenſe, than as referring to his intended ſacrifice of himſelf. If he be no more than a Teacher of virtue, and if he ſave us only by his good inſtructions, with what propriety of ſpeech could he talk of giving his fleſh to eat, and his blood to drink? This figure, doubtleſs, muſt be underſtood as repreſenting his death, and our ſalvation as reſulting from it, agreeably to thoſe other declarations of the Scriptures, which aſcribe our redemption to his blood. Allowing the reference to his atonement, the whole appears conſiſtent, and demands our moſt ſerious regard; but otherwiſe, it muſt be thought ſtrange and incongruous.

The Lord's ſupper was not, at this time, inſtituted; and therefore, though many of the expreſſions may be properly accommodated to that ſacrament, which is an emblematical repreſentation of the fleſh and blood of Chriſt given to us as our ſpiritual food and ſuſtenance, yet we are not warranted in drawing any concluſions from the paſſage before us, with reſpect to the efficacy of that ordinance. Thoſe, who communicate by faith, do indeed eat the fleſh and drink the blood of Chriſt, and they are vitally united to him. But the bare participation of the outward elements proves not a believing application to the Saviour, nor does it neceſſarily implant or increaſe the divine principle of life in the ſoul.

 renders

renders up his body to the most violent tortures, and consents to shed his blood; and the benefits of this atonement will be communicated to you through faith. As the common food of your bodies must be received, that it may afford the necessary sustenance, so must you feast upon the sacrifice, which my death will make, in order to derive from it true nourishment and vigour to your souls. The man, who thus maintains an habitual regard to me, as his grand and sole support, "who eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood," possesses the principle of immortal life within him, and I engage to raise his very dust from the grave in a glorified state. He is furnished with an entertainment more delightful, than the most sumptuous provisions can be to the senses. He is joined to me by a mysterious and inseparable union, which even resembles that of the eternal Father and the incarnate Son, and by virtue of which his soul shall be sustained and invigorated, through the constant communications of the Spirit. So far, then, does the heavenly manna surpass, in its excellent effects, that miraculous food, which was granted to your progenitors in the wilderness. That imparted a benefit, comparatively mean in its nature, and short in its continuance; but this, which is now exhibited, will secure life and happiness of the most exalted kind, and durable as eternity."

Such was the purport of our Lord's address to the Jews, and it is equally interesting to us, as it was to them. Have we seriously considered it, and the important doctrines it involves? What impressions, then, are produced in our minds? Are we, like them, disposed

posed to murmur, because Jesus claims such an exalted dignity? Or, are we inclined to enter into curious speculations, and dispute against the plain assertions of the Bible, because they contain some things, which baffle our comprehension! How presumptuous is such a spirit! Rather, let us consider our blindness and extreme depravity, and suspect our own conclusions. Let us fervently implore those divine influences, which God hath promised, and which the wisest and best of men continually need. Our understandings must be illuminated, truly to discern the appointed method of salvation in the Gospel; our carnal prejudices and affections must be subdued, that our objections against it may be effectually silenced; and our wills must be brought under a holy bias, that we may yield a cordial compliance.

Jesus is exhibited as the heavenly manna, which alone can nourish our souls to life eternal: Have we made use of him in this character? He condescended to be made "partaker of flesh and blood," that dying in our nature he might expiate our guilt: Have we fixed our regard upon him, as our atoning sacrifice? It is solemnly declared, that, without a real participation of Christ by faith, we must remain in a state of spiritual death: Have we been sufficiently aware of the absolute necessity of believing? It is not enough, that we give a cool assent to this fact, that Jesus hath died for us; but we must place our whole reliance upon him, and expect pardon, peace, and everlasting glory, as obtained for us by his blood: Do we constantly maintain such a temper of mind towards him? Great and blessed are the effects

of this humble and cordial application to the Saviour: Can we teſtify of their reality and excellence? Do we daily feed on the ſacred ſuſtenance, here provided for us, and find in it the moſt exquiſite delight? Are we ſenſible of any communion between Jeſus and our own ſouls? And do we derive from him, refreſhment when we are weary, ſtrength when we faint, and comfort when we are oppreſſed with troubles? If this be our caſe, we may rejoice in the confidence, that he will bring us forth, at the general reſurrection, with triumph and exceeding joy, and grant us a ſure abode in his own glorious preſence for evermore.

Such a free declaration of the myſteries of faith, and eſpecially ſuch a particular application of them to the conſciences of the hearers, will generally excite offence; nor ſhould the miniſters of Chriſt be ſurpriſed at that effect, when they obſerve the reception, which their Maſter met with. Many, even of his profeſſed friends and diſciples, began to cavil at his doctrine as harſh and unintelligible. He perceived their inward diſaffection, and replied to the very objections, which they were afraid to utter. He intimated, that he ſhould ſoon return to heaven, from whence he had come down, and that his aſcenſion, which might puzzle them as much as what he had aſſerted, would prove the juſtice of his claims. To prevent their abuſe of the ſubject, he guarded them againſt a literal acceptation of his words, and directed them to the ſpiritual ſenſe, in which alone they could be underſtood with profit. But he remarked, that as he had been aware of their ſecret unbelief from the very firſt, he had in-

fifted on divine influences, as neceffary to remove the oppofition of their hearts againft him.

From that time, many, who had long followed him, perceiving, probably, that their hypocrify was detected, totally withdrew and returned no more. Nay, fuch was the defertion, that it might feem as if the very twelve were ftaggered, and ready to depart. Jefus, therefore, called upon them to declare explicitly, whether they would abide with him, or no; that fo their fervice might not appear to be conftrained, but voluntary. The moft diftant propofal, however, of apoftatizing from the Saviour, will ever ftrike the fincere believer with horror. Accordingly, Peter ftood forth, as the mouth of the Apoftles, maintaining their immovable attachment to him, and ftedfaft dependence upon him for eternal life, rejecting, alfo, with fixed refolution, the thought of forfaking him, as big with mifery and ruin. This was, indeed, a good confeffion. Yet, that they might ftill exercife a holy jealoufy, and not be fhaken in their minds by what would foon take place among themfelves, he intimated, that even in their fmall company, which he had felected for his own peculiar fociety, there was one perfon who poffeffed fo malignant a difpofition, as to refemble the Devil himfelf. Ah! what terror, what diftreffing enquiries muft this excite among them!

Is it any objection, then, to the Chriftian Church at the prefent day, that it contains many unfound members? Falfehearted profeffors are to be expected at all times; but, in general, fome temptation or other will occur, which will manifeft their infincerity. Fre-

quently, they are offended by the plain dealing of their ministers; and it is no wonder, that they depart from those, who suspect them of hypocrisy. How awful is their case! "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness *." May the example awaken the attention of all, who bear the Christian name! Happy those who are preserved unshaken, in the midst of numerous apostates. We ask, then, of what kind is your attachment to Jesus? "Will ye also go away?" Are you, "who seemed to be pillars, moved from your hope?" You must, indeed, be left to your own choice: but we entreat you to form that choice deliberately, with a full view of all the consequences before you. If you depart from Christ, to whom can you betake yourselves? Is there any other refuge? Are "the words of eternal life" to be found any where besides? We exhort you, then, that whatever difficulties may arise, you would not "draw back unto perdition," but "with purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord."

* 2 Pet. ii. 21.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 21.

Jesus replied to the cavils of Pharisees—cautioned the people against them—tried and commended the faith of a woman of Canaan—wrought many cures—fed four thousand by a miracle—opposed by Pharisees and Sadducees—restored sight to a blind man at Bethsaida—declared his character, and foretold his passion, to his disciples, requiring them also to suffer with him.

THOUGH we are informed of many minute occurrences in the life of Jesus, yet many are concealed from us. We are not told, whether he was present at the celebration of the passover, which succeeded the transactions recorded in the preceding section. But, it is probable, that, at that season of national concourse, various reports of Him, who engaged universal attention, were carried from Galilee to Jerusalem, and that these excited the envious displeasure of the public and most distinguished teachers of religion. It is certain, however, that many of that description, the Scribes and Pharisees, went down from the city, and, as it is likely, to Capernaum, though at a considerable distance, for the express purpose of collecting some grounds

grounds of accuſation, or of bringing him into diſcredit with the people *. Theſe men, with all their pretences to ſanctity, were the moſt violent oppoſers of the Saviour, and were, evidently, actuated by the baſeſt motives in their conduct towards him. They diſcovered great zeal, by taking ſo long a journey; but it was in a bad cauſe. Nor is it uncommon for thoſe, who reſiſt the truth, to be at immenſe pains and expenſe for the accompliſhment of their purpoſes, and even to ſuppoſe that they are "doing God ſervice," at the very time they are filled with enmity againſt him.

Perſons, ſo diſpoſed, will ſeldom be at a loſs for objections. Something or other, in the moſt exemplary behaviour, will appear cenſurable to the envious and malicious eye. What cauſe of complaint, then, did theſe inſidious adverſaries find againſt the holy Jeſus? They upbraided him with the contempt, which his diſciples ſhewed for their traditions, in eating without firſt waſhing their hands. How ridiculous, and how palpable, was their hypocriſy, who laid ſuch ſtreſs on outward purifications, and perceived not their need of inward ſanctity! Men are ever prone to depend on a ſtrict obſervance of rites and ceremonies even of their own invention, and to ſubſtitute them for "the power of godlineſs," or to imagine that theſe will compenſate the neglect of the moſt expreſs, moral injunctions. Jeſus, therefore, convicted them of their glaring inconſiſtency, in preferring their ſuperſtitious inſtitutions to the abſolute precepts of God. He produced one inſtance, in which they virtually abrogated the fifth

* Mat. xv. 1—20. Mark vii. 1—23.

commandment.

commandment. For they excused thoſe, who, through a falſe pretext of piety and of devoting their ſubſtance to God, refuſed to relieve their aged parents in diſtreſs. They accounted it ſufficient to ſay, " We have bound ourſelves by a vow to give our money to the treaſury or ſome ſacred uſe, and are therefore freed from the obligation of contributing to the ſupport of our father or our mother."

It is indiſpenſably required, that we " learn firſt to ſhew piety at home, and to requite our parents; for that is good and acceptable before God *." We cannot, therefore, credit their profeſſions of religion, who violate ſo plain and ſtrict an injunction; nor can any ſacrifices to God, however coſtly, be accepted in lieu of this important duty. Yet in many ſuch ways did theſe corrupt teachers flatter their deluded followers. Our Lord obſerved that their vile diſſimulation was accurately deſcribed by one of their own prophets. For, like thoſe of old, they " drew near to God with their mouth, and with their lips did honour him, but removed their heart far from him †." And do none of modern times reſemble them? Have we not thoſe, who with a rigorous exactneſs inſiſt on the particular diſtinctions of their own party, and inſtitutions of merely human authority, while they allow themſelves to tranſgreſs, in various inſtances, the eternal rules of righteouſneſs, and ſuppoſe that their ceremonial ſcrupuloſity or religious zeal will be a ſufficient vindication of their conduct? Ah! what will avail the moſt ſpecious pretences to devotion before that God, who " deſireth truth in the in-

* 1 Tim. v. 4. † Iſa. xxix. 13.

ward

ward parts?" "In vain we do worſhip him," if we offer him only the ſervice of the lips, or attempt to ſubſtitute any obſervances inſtead of that holy obedience, which he requires.

This was a proper occaſion, and Jeſus therefore embraced it, to warn the people not to be miſled by ſuch ignorant expounders of the law, and to ſhew them, that the depravity of the heart is the grand ſource of impurity, which renders us defiled in the ſight of God. The Phariſees, offended with his plain reproofs, and confounded in their deſigns, had gone away in diſguſt. On that account, the diſciples, in private, expreſſed their fears for the conſequence; but he bad them not to be diſturbed by thoſe perverſe oppoſers of the truth, inaſmuch as both they, and their infatuated followers, would ſoon be overwhelmed with final and remedileſs deſtruction.

It is an awful caſe, when thoſe, who know not the way to heaven, undertake to be public inſtructers. How fatal the effects to themſelves and others! The deceived and the deceiver, however they may flatter and be flattered, ſhall periſh together. Let us not, therefore, blindly and implicitly ſubmit to the opinions and dictates of men, though they may bear a reſpectable character, or even fill the higheſt ſtations in the Church. But let us form our judgment, not from human deciſions, but from "the law and the teſtimony," ſince, whoever may be our teachers, we muſt anſwer for ourſelves before the bar of God.

The declarations of our Lord were not well underſtood even by his own diſciples. Having reproved them,

them, therefore, in ſecret for their dulneſs of comprehenſion, he affirmed in plainer terms, that the heart is the ſeat and ſource of all moral pollution, that the food which is received for the proper nouriſhment of the body brings no defilement upon the ſoul, but that the man is rendered unclean and offenſive before God, only in conſequence of his inward depravity, and that which proceeds from it. This is a doctrine, which calls for deep humiliation and conſtant circumſpection. It is eaſy to eat with clean hands; but would that purge the conſcience? Ah! "Who can ſay, I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my ſin *?" According to the deſcription, which Jeſus here gave, our fallen nature is ſo fruitful of evil, that it puts forth, as its common produce, all manner of impurity. Hence we are taught to account for the various kinds of iniquity in the world. Corrupt reaſonings, irregular deſires, ſenſual affections, lewdneſs, violence, diſhoneſty, avarice, malevolence, treachery, envy, profaneneſs, pride, and folly, have but one and the ſame origin: "they come from within." What, then, ſhall we think of the fountain, which ſends forth ſuch filthy ſtreams? How ſuitable is the confeſſion of Job, "Behold I am vile!" How exactly adapted to our caſe, is that gracious promiſe of the new Covenant, "I will ſprinkle clean water upon you, and ye ſhall be clean:—a new heart alſo will I give you, and a new ſpirit will I put within you †!"

Jeſus, withdrawing from the obſervation of his malicious enemies, went into the neighbourhood of Tyre

* Prov. xx. 9. † Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

and

and Sidon, which was a remote part of the land *. Here, for proper reaſons doubtleſs, he ſought to conceal himſelf, but found it impracticable. He was ſoon diſcovered, and applied to for relief; but his viſit is diſtinguiſhed only by one little occurrence, which exhibits a character, very oppoſite to that we have ſeen in the Phariſees. A poor, diſtreſſed woman, not "of the ſtock of Iſrael," but deſcended probably from the ancient Canaanites, is here produced as a ſurpriſing inſtance of the rich grace of God: and it is likely too, that her caſe was intended to intimate, that mercy would ſhortly appear for the outcaſts of the Gentiles. She had heard of the wonderful works of Jeſus, from which, it ſhould ſeem, ſhe believed him to be the very Saviour whom the Jews were taught to expect from the family of David. Under this conviction ſhe had recourſe to him, in behalf of her beloved daughter, who was grievouſly afflicted with a demoniacal poſſeſſion. She implored his kind interpoſition for her child, and urged her requeſt with peculiar ardour.

The caſe was truly pitiable; but the behaviour of Jeſus, on this occaſion, was ſomewhat ſingular. We have hitherto obſerved him attentive to every cry of diſtreſs, and ready to render his aſſiſtance, wherever it was ſolicited. But now he appeared totally regardleſs of the importunate ſupplicant, and returned no anſwer to her prayer. After ſome time, the diſciples interceded for her, perhaps through real compaſſion, or being wearied with her inceſſant cries. Yet even this application ſeemed to meet with an abſolute refuſal,

* Mat. xv. 21—29. Mark vii. 24, &c.

becauſe

because the immediate objects of his commission were "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and not "sinners of the Gentiles." What, then, could be alleged in her behalf? She determined not to give up her petition, but rather to press it with greater earnestness, though she had nothing to plead but her misery. She cast herself at his feet, in adoration of his power and grace, exclaiming, with evident expressions of inward anguish, and yet of entire reliance upon him, "Lord, help me." Still the Saviour appeared deaf to her entreaties, and even to reject her with contempt; for he replied, that the Jews, as children of the family, had a prior claim to his regard, and that it would be improper to cast their bread to "the dogs:" such being the low estimation in which the Gentiles were held.

From this severe repulse we might have considered her case as desperate: but she, with unshaken dependence, "against hope believed in hope." Her difficulties increased her ardour, so that she turned the very objections, urged against her, into an argument in her own favour. Allowing the justness of our Lord's allusion, and that she deserved to be treated no otherwise than the dogs, she begged permission to gather some crumbs under the Master's table, which the children would not use; intimating, that, as his grace was so large, like the provisions of a rich entertainment, some small portion of it might be extended to her, worthless as she was, without injury to his peculiar people.

We might possibly accuse the Saviour of acting with rigorous cruelty towards this poor woman. But the close of the narrative unfolds the reasons of his conduct.

Though

Though for ſome time he appeared unrelenting and inexorable, yet at length his compaſſion broke forth; and then it was found, that he had withheld from her the deſired mercy, only that he might exerciſe her faith, for its further increaſe, and exhibit it to public view for the inſtruction and encouragement of others. When, therefore, ſhe had given full proof of her unfeigned humility, and firm reliance upon him, he no longer frowned, but granted her petition in the moſt gracious manner: he declared his warmeſt approbation of her principles, and aſſured her of the perfect and inſtantaneous recovery of her daughter.

What, then, do we learn from this incident? We hear of Jeſus; but do we believe him to be "the Son of David," the "Lord," who can "have mercy on us?" Have we no requeſt to make; no bleſſing to implore from him? Let us pray with importunity, and take no denial. Perhaps, he may deal with us, as he did with the woman of Canaan, by ſeeming to diſregard our diſtreſs, and to reject our ſuit with diſdain. But let not this apparent neglect deter us: though repulſed again and again, let us renew our application with freſh ardour, and doubt not a happy iſſue. He may require us to wait long for the very mercy, which he means to beſtow. In the mean time, we are to manifeſt our deep contrition, and the ſtrength of our confidence in his power, faithfulneſs, and love. Nay, though our guilt and depravity may be urged againſt us, as rendering us unſuitable objects for the Saviour's notice, we may ſolicit him, the more earneſtly, to glorify himſelf in our deliverance. But ah! how much impatience

impatience do we discover! How hardly do we bear the least delay! How soon do we give up our expectation in despondency; as if "the mercy of God were clean gone for ever, and his promise had failed for evermore!" How wretched, then, would be our condition, if he should treat us according to our own unbelieving apprehensions!

Jesus, having left the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, came near to the sea of Galilee, where he ascended a mountain, probably for the purpose of instructing the multitudes, who followed him. Here, the case of one, deprived entirely of his hearing and almost of his speech, was submitted to him; nor was his help implored in vain. Devoutly looking up in prayer, and then pronouncing the word with peculiar majesty, he instantly restored the obstructed faculties to their proper functions. That he might avoid ostentation, or that he might not provoke the malice of his enemies, he desired the matter to be concealed from public notice; but the cure appeared so wonderful, that it was soon proclaimed abroad, and all expressed their admiration of his character, saying, "He hath done all things well."

Nor was this the only miracle, which he performed there. Many other infirm and diseased persons were brought and cast at his feet, who excited his pity, and experienced his power to heal *. These astonishing events could not but make a deep impression on the minds of the people, who, therefore, "glorified the God of Israel" for his gracious interposition. And shall

* Mat. xv. 30, &c. Mark viii. 1—10.

we hear of them with a careleſs indifference? Shall we not be induced, from ſuch proofs of the ſtrength and mercy of our Redeemer, to truſt, and love, and praiſe, and ſerve him? Shall we not perceive herein the performance of ancient promiſes, and bleſs God, who "hath remembered his holy Covenant, and raiſed up an horn of ſalvation for us?"

The dignity of Jeſus was diſplayed in other inſtances. Again he put forth his creative power, as on a former occaſion, to ſupply the neceſſities of thoſe who attended his miniſtry. Moved with compaſſion for the people, who had continued with him three days together, and were then quite deſtitute of food, and many of them at a diſtance from their own homes, he furniſhed a table for them in the open fields. He directed his diſciples to impart to them their own proviſions. Theſe were ſeven loaves and a few ſmall fiſhes; but, poor as the ſtock was, it was ſo increaſed in the diſtribution, that four thouſand perſons, beſides women and children, were fed and ſatisfied. The remains of this miraculous feaſt, as of the former, exceeded the original ſtore; ſeven baſkets of fragments being gathered up. He has afforded us ſufficient encouragement, ſurely, to depend upon him for our daily bread. Only let us follow him in the way of duty, and he will not ſuffer us to "want any good thing." He "giveth food to all fleſh;" nay, "the earth is his, and the fulneſs thereof;" ſo that he can, without difficulty, ſupply all our need. He has inſtructed us, alſo, we perceive, to be frugal in the midſt of plenty, and not to laviſh by an uſeleſs profuſion, what his bounty beſtows. In every

caſe

case it is proper to "gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost."

Having dismissed the multitude, he crossed the sea to the coasts of Magdala. Here a fresh attack was made upon him by a company of Pharisees and Sadducees united, who wished to ensnare him*. These men were as repugnant to each other in their principles, as possible; the former being superstitious in the extreme, the latter perfectly licentious; but they came together to tempt Jesus. We see, that persons of opposite tempers, of different sentiments, and of adverse parties, who cordially hate one another, can lay aside their animosities for a season, and forget their mutual malevolence, that they may join their strength and interest, in acting against Christ. These subtle antagonists, like modern infidels, objected to the sufficiency of his evidence, and demanded of him another sort of attestation, than what he had yet given. They desired "a sign from heaven," intending, probably, some splendid appearance in the skies. But is it not the height of pride and insolence for sinners to prescribe unto God, what measures of conduct he should pursue, what kind of a revelation he should afford them, or by what particular testimonies it should be confirmed? Men presumptuously despise and reject the plain and incontestable proofs, by which he has evinced the truth of his Gospel, and arrogantly call for those, which he has wisely denied, and which would be ineffectual to convince them.

* Mat. xvi. 1—12. Mark viii. 11—21.

Many diſcover an acute diſcernment in their attention to worldly things, who betray the groſſeſt ignorance and ſtupor in ſpiritual concerns. They will, alſo, tranſact their ſecular affairs with confidence, where they have nothing to depend on, but mere conjecture; and yet hazard their eternal ſalvation, while they are petulantly objecting to the infallible credentials of the holy ſcriptures. Such was the caſe of thoſe captious diſputants, who attacked the Saviour: and on this ground he reproved their inconſiſtency in forming an accurate judgment of the weather, and obſtinately refuſing to "diſcern the ſigns of the times." He then declared, with deep diſtreſs for their awful ſtate, that no ſuch evidence, as they deſired, would be granted, except it were his own reſurrection on the third day; and then he left them to themſelves, departing to the oppoſite ſide of the lake. Let their caſe ſtand as a ſolemn admonition to thoſe, who ſtudy to invalidate revelation by their ſubtle arguments. Alas! while you are debating, Jeſus may entirely withdraw himſelf from you, and give you up to corrupt reaſonings, and confirmed obduracy of heart.

When they had croſſed the ſea, the diſciples of Jeſus were diſtreſſed to find, that they had nearly exhauſted their whole ſtock of proviſions. Their Maſter, to turn off their attention to a more profitable ſubject, cautioned them to "beware of the leaven of the Phariſees and of the Sadducees," intending thereby to guard them againſt the dangerous opinions of thoſe falſe teachers, whom he had lately combated. But they were ſo anxious

anxious about their bodily ſuſtenance, that they conſidered him only as directing them, what bread they were to avoid. He reproved them, therefore, very ſharply for their dulneſs of comprehenſion in ſpiritual things, and for their diſtruſting fears of wanting food to eat, after having twice ſeen, as they had done, thouſands ſupported by a miracle. Do not moſt of our own painful apprehenſions ariſe from our ignorance and unbelief, and from a forgetfulneſs of the Lord's gracious interpoſitions in our favour? Oh! what ſhame and confuſion belong to us, becauſe we have profited no more by our paſt experience!

Jeſus then declared explicitly, that he meant to guard them againſt thoſe corrupt doctrines of his oppoſers, which might be compared to leaven. How inſinuating, how infectious is error! How ſoon it ſpreads its influence, though often imperceptibly! Are we aware of the dangerous conſequence of admitting it? Or do we fooliſhly imagine, that all opinions are equally ſafe? Are there no fatal miſtakes, in our own days, of which we ſhould be ſuſpicious? Yes, there never was a time, when ſuch a caution was more neceſſary. Take heed, then, that ye be not "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight of men, and cunning craftineſs, whereby they lie in wait to deceive *."

Jeſus came to Bethſaida, where he was requeſted to extend his compaſſion to a blind man †. He readily conſented; and yet he choſe not to perform the miracle within the confines of the town, nor would he ſuffer the perſon to return thither, to publiſh his caſe:

* Eph. iv. 14. † Mark viii. 22—26.

which might be intended as a mark of his difpleafure againft the unbelieving inhabitants. Many of the aftonifhing effects of his power and grace, at this time alfo, are purpofely concealed from the obfervation of finners, who would be difpofed to treat them with contempt and derifion. But the day is approaching, when all his wonderful works, and the excellency of his character, fhall be made known to the affembled univerfe, to the unfpeakable joy of his faithful people, and the confufion of his enemies.

When he had withdrawn the man to a little diftance from the city, he reftored his fight, though in a gradual manner. At the firft touch of the Saviour, fome faint glimmerings of light were conveyed to the darkened eyes, fo that things were perceived very obfcurely, and men appeared " as trees, walking." But, upon the fecond touch, every object was feen diftinctly. In each one of his miracles, Jefus exhibited his divine perfections: but he did not confine himfelf to a particular mode of operation. In fome inftances, we apprehend, the full blaze of day was fuddenly poured in upon the blind, but here was a regular advance from one degree of clearnefs to another. It is the fame in fpiritual concerns. He alone " giveth light and underftanding to the fimple;" but the methods of his grace are different in different perfons. We muft not dictate to him, nor fet up the cafe of any Chriftian as a ftandard, to which that of all others muft be accommodated. Some are inftantaneoufly " called out of darknefs into marvellous light;" whilft many attain, by a flow progrefs, to the knowledge of the truth. The leaft meafure of divine illumination

illumination is an earneſt for good. It is like the twilight of the morning, which announces the riſing of the ſun. Though much obſcurity, therefore, may attend your preſent views, be encouraged to wait upon the Saviour, in hope of receiving a more diſtinct perception. "The path of the juſt is as the ſhining light, that ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day *."

Jeſus now changed his ſituation, and betook himſelf to Ceſarea-Philippi, in the northern extremity of Judea †. In that neighbourhood, being retired with his diſciples, he enquired of them, what were the general ſentiments of men concerning him. When informed, that he was thought to be either John the Baptiſt, or ſome one of the ancient prophets, who was riſen from the dead, he urged them to declare their own opinion of his character. To this there could be no other anſwer from his own attendants, than what Peter immediately returned in the name of the reſt, "Thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God." The confeſſion was explicit, decided, and ingenuous; and Jeſus pronounced the favoured Apoſtle, who made it, peculiarly bleſſed, as having received his knowledge, not by his natural abilities, or any human aid, but by divine communication. Then, having aſſerted the infallible ſecurity of his Church, againſt all aſſaults of the powers of darkneſs, he promiſed to uſe Peter as a principal inſtrument in building that ſacred edifice, and ſettling the concerns of his government. This amounted to a clear and explicit avowal, that he was indeed the

* Prov. iv. 18. † Mat. xvi. 13, &c. Mark viii. 27, &c. ix. 1. Luke ix. 18—27.

Saviour, poſſeſſed of ſupreme authority: but it paſſed only in private, and from motives of prudence he charged them not to divulge the matter till the proper ſeaſon.

What are our concluſions, reſpecting the extraordinary character before us? Do we know him to be the Chriſt? Let us not preſume on our own ſagacity, the advantages of education, or any aſſiſtance from men, but implore the divine influence upon our minds; "that the God of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wiſdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him *." Or, are we grounded on the only ſure foundation, "the rock," which cannot be moved? Then let us exult in our high privileges, and truſting to the promiſe, let us defy the fierceſt attacks of our moſt malicious enemies.

Jeſus, having expreſsly acknowledged his real character, began to ſpeak to his diſciples with leſs reſerve, concerning himſelf and the particular means, by which he ſhould accompliſh redemption for his people. He, therefore, plainly foretold his approaching ſufferings, death, and reſurrection. But ſuch a Saviour they had not looked for; and the declaration ſtaggered their faith. Peter, in particular, with his uſual forwardneſs, dared to object to the ſcheme, as unworthy of his Maſter, and to diſſuade him from it. This brought upon him a ſharp rebuke; for he had evidently betrayed very low and carnal conceptions of the kingdom of Chriſt, and appeared even as an accomplice of Satan, in oppoſing his Lord's deſigns. Let us ſeek for proper

* Eph. i. 17.

views

views of the way of ſalvation. If Peter was acting a diabolical part, when he tempted Jeſus to relinquiſh the end, for which he came into the world, let us be well eſtabliſhed in this fundamental article of our creed, that " we have redemption through his blood," and that " he appeared to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf*."

From this circumſtance, Jeſus was led to addreſs, not his diſciples only, but the multitude at large, on the neceſſity of being willing to ſuffer with him. Let us attend to his ſolemn declarations; for they concern ourſelves. Do we profeſs a regard to him? He exhorts us to enter upon a ſtrict courſe of ſelf-denial, and to ſubmit to extreme difficulties, even to martyrdom itſelf, in his cauſe. We muſt teſtify a grateful ſenſe of his love, and a pure deſire to promote his glory, by ſacrificing eaſe, intereſt, reputation, and life itſelf, when we are required, for his ſake. An inordinate attachment to preſent enjoyments will ruin us for ever; but a cheerful renunciation of every thing dear and valuable upon earth, in the ſervice of Chriſt, will be recompenſed with eternal bleſſedneſs hereafter.

Are any deterred, by ſuch conſiderations, from following the Saviour? Then make your choice, and, if you pleaſe, prefer the world to him. Secure its beſt delights, and, if it be poſſible, poſſeſs the whole of its pomps, its dominion, or its pleaſures: what will you have gained? Can you eſtimate your profit, when you ſhall be rejected of God, and your ſouls loſt, beyond the power of recovery, for ever? Is there any equivalent to be offered, by which you could purchaſe a re-

* Eph. i. 7. Heb. ix. 26.

leaſe

leafe from hell, or even a mitigation of its torments? And are your immortal fpirits in danger of perifhing? Yes: the Judge ftandeth before the door;"—" the Son of man fhall come," with all the glory of his divine majefty, and with the whole retinue of heaven; and you muft appear at his tribunal, to receive " according to your works." What, then, have you to look for at his hands, if you have oppofed his caufe, or, through the bafe principle of fear or fhame, have declined the profeffion of his Gofpel, or the fociety of his people? Think you, that he will then own you, and number you among his faints? No: he will feparate you from the company of thofe, to whom you durft not avow an attachment upon earth; he will reject you with abhorrence, and confign you to a ftate of unutterable confufion, torment, and defpair.

Such was the purport of our Lord's folemn admonitions; and in the fame manner fhould finners of the prefent day be warned. Perhaps the objection might be raifed, If he were indeed of that exalted dignity, which he reprefented, why did not his glory immediately appear? And it might be with a view to obviate the difficulty, that he affured the perfons around him, that fome of them fhould not die, till they had feen a grand exhibition of his majefty, which might be confidered as the commencement of his government. Some have fuppofed that this referred to his transfiguration, which foon followed; but it has more generally been explained of that remarkable difplay of his power, which took place in the deftruction of Jerufalem, to the overthrow of his enemies, and the efta-

blifhment

bliſhment of his Church. That event he frequently deſcribed as his coming; and it was an awful emblem of his future and more illuſtrious advent for the final judgment of the world.

His predictions have been in part fulfilled; and in due time, when his righteous purpoſes are effected, they will all have their full completion. He will be revealed in his glory, as he hath told us; "and every eye ſhall ſee him." How ſhall we ſtand before him? What is our hope and expectation? Does the proſpect of his manifeſtation fill us with delight? For ſo it ought to do, if we be indeed partakers of his ſalvation. It is the privilege of his faithful people to look and long for his appearing, crying, "Come, Lord Jeſus, come quickly." But ſuch as remain at enmity againſt him, have abundant cauſe to dread "the day of the Lord." In vain will they call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them, and hide them from his face. They muſt be arraigned at his bar; and their everlaſting doom ſhall be pronounced from his mouth.—May we find mercy of the Lord in that day and enter with him into his kingdom for ever! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 22.

Jeſus was transfigured, and declared to be the Son of God—expelled an evil ſpirit, which his Apoſtles could not—warned them of his approaching ſufferings—paid the ſacred tribute by a miracle—ſuggeſted ſolemn cautions againſt ambition, offences, contempt of any the weakeſt believers, ſeverity and revenge towards an offending brother.

THE Lord Jeſus Chriſt appeared upon earth in a ſtate of profound humiliation: the brightneſs of his original glory being obſcured by the infirmities of humanity, and the external meanneſs of his condition. His example, indeed, his preaching, and his miracles, proved him to be, not only ſuperior to the children of men, but "the Lord from heaven." There were alſo certain occaſions, on which his true dignity was diſplayed in a very ſignal manner. The following inſtance is of that kind; and it ſeems to have been intended, not for vain parade, but for important purpoſes to himſelf and others.

About a week after the ſolemn addreſs to his diſciples, which was laſt mentioned, he retired to a high mountain (ſuppoſed by ſome to be mount Tabor), for

for the purpofes of fecret devotion *. He felected three out of the twelve, Peter, James, and John, his favoured attendants, that they might be witneffes of a grand exhibition of his glory, as they foon afterwards were of his diftreffing agony in the garden of Gethfemane. In their prefence, as he offered up his fervent fupplications, he affumed a moft magnificent appearance, putting off, for a feafon, "the form of a fervant and the likenefs of men," and difcovering his proper character, while he fhone with the luftre of divine majefty. His countenance became bright and dazzling, as the fun in the firmament; and fuch a fplendour covered his whole body, that the rays, as it were, darted through his garments, which alfo were luminous and fparkling as the light itfelf. Two eminent perfons, likewife, who had been honoured in his fervice upon earth, Mofes and Elijah, then attended him from the world of fpirits, in a glittering refplendent form, and converfed with him on the grand defign of his incarnation, the facrifice which he was fhortly to make for the fins of mankind, by his crucifixion at Jerufalem.

A fight fo wonderful, might well overwhelm the three Apoftles. At firft, they had fallen afleep through fatigue; but being awakened, probably by the exceeding brightnefs of the appearance, they beheld the aftonifhing fpectacle, and heard the conclufion of the conference. Peter, in particular, experienced fo rapturous a furprife upon the occafion, that he exclaimed, "Mafter, it is good for us to be here," and propofed to erect tabernacles for the accommodation of their Lord and his

* Mat. xvii. 1—13. Mark ix. 2—13. Luke ix. 28—36.

his two illuſtrious attendants, as if he could have ſpent his life upon the mount, amidſt ſuch tranſcendent glory, and with ſuch exalted company. But he ſcarcely underſtood the meaning of his own words.

This was not the whole. Immediately a ſhining cloud, as an emblem of the divine preſence, perhaps reſembling the ancient Shechinah, overſhadowed them, and impreſſed them with ſolemn awe; while a voice from heaven proclaimed Jeſus to be the Son of the eternal Father, and the object of his ſupreme complacency, and required an earneſt regard and an unfeigned ſubmiſſion to him. Here, then, was a clear revelation, and a near approach of the Deity. But was not the grand exhibition too much for human powers to ſuſtain? Alas! ſuch is our ſtate of infirmity, and ſuch the effect of guilt upon the conſcience, that the moſt advanced ſaints in this world would feel ſome degree of terror, if God were to manifeſt himſelf to them in his glorious majeſty, though ſweetly tempered with grace and mercy. If our eyes ſhould behold the Lord of hoſts, we could not but adopt the language of Job, "I abhor myſelf, and repent in duſt and aſhes *;" we could not help exclaiming like the prophet, "Wo is me! for I am undone, becauſe I am a man of unclean lips †;" or we ſhould ſay as Peter, "Depart from me: for I am a ſinful man, O Lord ‡." So theſe three diſtinguiſhed diſciples "fell on their face and were ſore afraid." But Jeſus, who undertakes to introduce his people into the preſence of God, and to give them confidence before him, immediately interpoſed for their ſupport and comfort.

* Job xlii. 6. † Iſa. vi. 5. ‡ Luke v. 8.

fort. He put his hands on them, and encouraged them to arise, and lay aside their fears.

The transfiguration was ended; the heavenly visitants disappeared; and Jesus, being left alone with his Apostles, charged them not to divulge what they had seen, till after his resurrection. Perhaps, their account of it would not have been credited before that event, and it might have produced some dangerous consequences. It should seem, that they expected Elijah's continuance among them, and were surprised at his being withdrawn. For it was commonly supposed from Malachi's prediction, that he would return to dwell on the earth, to effect a general reformation, and thus prepare the way for the kingdom of Messiah *. But Jesus taught them, that the prophecy had been already fulfilled in the spirit of it; John the Baptist, who resembled Elijah in his zeal and habits of austerity, had appeared for those purposes, which were predicted.

And what impression does the narration of this singular vision make upon our minds? It is circumstantially related, and confidently attested, not only by three Evangelists, but by one of those who were eyewitnesses of it. St. Peter produces it as a strong proof, that they had not "followed cunningly devised fables," but that Jesus was indeed what they had heard him declared to be by a voice from heaven, "the Son of God †." And are we receiving him as the beloved of the Father? Do we admire, praise, and trust him? Are we also, as the Father, "well pleased" in him? Do we

* Mal. iv. 5, 6.

† 2 Pet. i. 16—18. See also 1 John i. 1—3.

feel

feel a holy complacency and delight in his mediation, as a ſufficient ground of hope and confidence towards God? Do we hear him, as our Teacher to inſtruct, our Saviour to comfort, and our Lord to command us? Then by faith we behold an unſpeakable glory in him, though not that outward luſtre, ſo dazzling to the bodily ſight upon the mount. Then we ſhall not only conſider him as "the man Chriſt Jeſus," but believe that the ſplendour of the divine majeſty reſides in him, and we ſhall devoutly worſhip him, as "our Lord and our God."

It is probable, that the transfiguration was intended to animate and ſtrengthen Jeſus himſelf, who in his human nature might be ready to faint under the apprehenſion of his approaching ſufferings, as well as to prevent his choſen companions from being ſtaggered by the depth of his humiliation. They were, therefore, the better prepared to attend him in the garden of Gethſemane, and to ſtand by his croſs on mount Calvary. They beheld a token of his future glory, an emblem of that tranſcendent brightneſs which he ſhould poſſeſs upon his return to heaven: and we conſider it, alſo, as in ſome ſort a repreſentation of that magnificent and awful appearance, when, "being in the form of God," he ſhall come again "to judge the quick and dead," accompanied with a grand retinue, not merely Moſes and Elijah, but "ten thouſand of his ſaints." The proſpect ſhould cheer and revive your hearts, if indeed you are his faithful diſciples. You ſhall be witneſſes and partakers of his triumphant exaltation: "when Chriſt, who is our life, ſhall appear, then ſhall

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ye alſo appear with him in glory *." You likewiſe ſhall be transfigured, "You ſhall be like him, for you ſhall ſee him as he is †," and "ſhall ſhine forth as the ſun in the kingdom of your Father ‡." Then it may be ſaid in the higheſt ſenſe, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." From that holy mount you will never be called down: and the glory, which is there to be revealed, "fadeth not away."

When Jeſus returned to his other diſciples, whom he had left behind, he found them engaged in diſputation with the Scribes, who, probably, were endeavouring to ſubvert their faith §. Upon his appearance, the vaſt multitudes of people, who ſurrounded them, ran with eager joy to expreſs their reſpect. But they were ſtruck with amazement; and, though we are not acquainted with the cauſe, it is poſſible, that this effect might be produced by ſome remaining luſtre, which they obſerved in his countenance: for thus the face of Moſes ſhone, when he deſcended from Sinai.

Amongſt the great numbers, who flocked around him, one perſon in particular, under extreme anguiſh, ſolicited his aid. He brought his ſon, his only child, who, inſtead of being a comfort to him, was a ſpectacle of horror, afflicted with lunacy, convulſed with fits, and tortured in various ways through the poſſeſſion of an evil ſpirit. The father, repreſenting the caſe, kneeled as an humble ſupplicant at the feet of Jeſus, and cried, "Lord, have mercy on my ſon:—if thou canſt do any thing, have compaſſion on us, and help us." In this

* Col. iii. 4. † 1 John iii. 2. ‡ Mat. xiii. 43.

§ Mat. xvii. 14, &c. Mark ix. 14—33. Luke ix. 37—45.

very application, the man diſcovered ſome degree of dependence; but doubt and heſitation ſeemed to be mixed with it: and perhaps his principles were ſhaken by the oppoſition of the Scribes, and by the failure of the diſciples, who had tried in vain to effect the cure. Jeſus, therefore, required a more decided teſtimony of his faith, and obſerved, that no deliverances were too great to be expected in an humble reliance upon him. The poor petitioner, being inſtantly convicted of his weakneſs, exclaimed, with evident marks of diſtreſs, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." The confeſſion was accepted, and the prayer granted. The Saviour did not even upbraid him with his diſtruſt, but proceeded to perform his requeſt. He rebuked and expelled the devil, who ſeemed unwilling to relinquiſh his hold, and, even in the act of departing, grievouſly tormented the unhappy patient. After ſuffering ſome violent agonies, the ſon was reſtored in perfect health to his rejoicing parent.

You alſo, who now come unto Jeſus, ſhould diſcloſe the troubles of your mind, and "pour out your heart before him:" in every inſtance, it will be proper for you to cry, "Lord, have mercy on us." But beware of entertaining any fears or ſuſpicions, which are diſhonourable to his character. No queſtion ought to be made, concerning his ability, or his diſpoſition, to help. "Canſt thou believe?" is the grand enquiry: for his bleſſings are communicated only to them, who confide in him. Difficulties, perhaps, ariſe, which ſtagger you, and fill you with miſgivings. Confeſs and lament this weakneſs before him, praying that he may pardon and

remove it, and not withhold his favour, through displeasure at the sin. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Nor should you entreat him for yourselves alone, but for your friend, or your child in distress. In all circumstances, he can extend the relief, which you want.

The disciples, as we have intimated, in vain attempted to expel the demon: and at this they expressed their wonder, when they had retired with their Master. They had wrought many miraculous cures before, and, perhaps, for that very reason, were too self-sufficient, or had forgot their entire dependence upon him for all their success. At least, in this instance there was a failure of their faith; and, accordingly, he taught them, that it was only by maintaining a constant, though feeble and doubting, reliance upon him, they could perform the most astonishing operations. He further observed, that it was necessary to implore divine assistance, especially on solemn occasions and in great difficulties, by a more than ordinary measure of devotion and humiliation.

We are not called to the same high office, or invested with the same powers, as the Apostles. But we have all, in our respective places, continual need of God's strengthening and supporting hand. In the view of our several duties and trials, we may see reason to cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Perhaps, our good endeavours have miscarried, because of our unbelief." With what temper of mind, have we set ourselves to combat our spiritual enemies? Shall we wonder, that we have been defeated, or that our cor-

ruptions ſtill retain their aſcendancy, notwithſtanding our oppoſition? For is it not true, here, alſo, that the victory, we ſeek, cannot be obtained, "but by prayer and faſting?"

From the mount of transfiguration, Jeſus paſſed through different parts of Galilee. There he ſought opportunities of privacy, that he might open to his diſciples, more fully than he had done before, his approaching ſufferings, death, and reſurrection. The ſubject had been repeatedly mentioned, but they were dull of apprehenſion, and unwilling to admit it. They ſtill looked for temporal dominion, and therefore could not bear to hear of his loſing his life in an ignominious and violent manner. They were diſtreſſed and confounded, and yet afraid to diſcloſe their difficulties. He, however, enduring with much indulgence their ignorance, ambition, and unbelief, continued to ſuggeſt his cautions, that he might gradually correct their miſtakes. The croſs of Chriſt has ever been matter of offence, and is ſo in our own day. This humbling ſcheme is what a proud and carnal mind cannot reliſh; and therefore it is accounted "fooliſhneſs." We are infinitely indebted to the mercy of God, who has rectified our notions and ſubdued our prejudices, if we are brought to admire it, to truſt and rejoice in it. For after all the vain cavils of preſumptuous men, it is "the power of God and the wiſdom of God." But you, who are averſe to this method of ſalvation, ſhould conſider, that it is not for you to preſcribe unto God. Submit implicitly to his gracious appointment, nor dare to quarrel with his terms. Beg of him to pardon your perverſeneſs,

perverfenefs, and give you more clearly to comprehend, what may for the prefent appear obfcure or inconfiftent.

When Jefus came to Capernaum, it was enquired by the collectors, whether he did not ufually pay the tribute; and his conduct upon that occafion was narrowly watched. Jefus difcuffed the fubject in private with his Apoftle Peter. He argued that he, as the Son of God, might plead a peculiar exemption from bearing the expenfe of fupporting his Father's houfe, (for the levy was probably that for the fervice of the temple) and that this fhould be laid upon ftrangers rather than upon him. But to avoid offence, and to guard againft a dangerous abufe of his example, he agreed to difcharge the claim. But whence was the money to be furnifhed? According to his directions, Peter caft an hook into the fea, and a fifh bearing in its mouth a filver coin to the full amount of the tribute, prefented itfelf as an eafy prey, at the very time and place in which it was wanted. This extraordinary method of payment difplayed his power and condefcenfion: his condefcenfion, in fubmitting to fuch a ftate of extreme poverty, though he was Lord of all, that he could not without a miracle produce the very fmall fum, fufficient to anfwer the demand; and his power, inafmuch as all creatures were compelled to yield obedience to him, in whatever way they were required.

Let us not then complain of our contracted circumftances, while we contemplate Jefus in fo mean a condition: nor let us hefitate to truft ourfelves under his care, when we fee how eafy it is for him to procure

money for neceſſary uſes. He has taught us to contribute cheerfully, in our reſpective ſtations, whatever may be needful for the ſupport of religion and civil government. "Render, therefore, to all their dues; tribute, to whom tribute is due; cuſtom, to whom cuſtom *." Withhold not from any, their juſt or reaſonable demands. If you profeſs to be followers of Jeſus, you will feel the force of his motive; and ſtudy to give no offence. The fear of increaſing the prejudices of the world againſt the Goſpel will make you circumſpect in this, as well as in other inſtances of your conduct.

Our Lord, having called the twelve around him, in the houſe where he was retired, addreſſed them with all the affection of a father, inſtructing, warning, and reproving them, as might be moſt expedient, according to their circumſtances †. He had overheard them debating upon the road, concerning the right of precedency in his kingdom; for, ſtill expecting a temporal dominion, and being too much under the influence of an ambitious ſpirit, they were all eager to obtain the higheſt places of preferment. But, when he had enquired the ſubject of their diſpute, and they ſeemed aſhamed to avow it, he ſpoke to their ſecret thoughts, and ſuggeſted, that, to be truly honourable in his account, they muſt poſſeſs other diſpoſitions, and excel in humility. At length, they introduced the matter openly, finding that it was not concealed, and aſked plainly, "Who is the greateſt?" To this he replied,

* Rom. xiii. 7.

† Mat. xviii. 1, &c. Mark ix. 33, &c. Luke ix. 46—48.

while

while he took an infant in his arms, that, except they were converted to God, and rendered meek, teachable, and free from designs of guile and aspiring views like little children, they would not only attain no exaltation, but have no share at all in his kingdom; and that the person, who discovered most of an unfeigned lowliness of mind, stood the highest in his favour.

And are we duly sensible of the spiritual nature of our religion? Are we not aiming at worldly grandeur and pre-eminence, instead of attending to the frame of our souls? What have we known of real conversion of heart? Is not the very term treated with profane ridicule, as if the mention of it proved a man a visionary and an enthusiast! But, surely, if conversion were so absolutely necessary in our Lord's time, it cannot now be dispensed with, however the idea may be scorned among us. Where shall we look for Christian humility? Do all, who pretend to be the disciples of Jesus, bear evident marks of a child-like simplicity, submission, and dependence? Or rather, is not such a disposition derided as despicable meanness? How strange, that those should retain the name of Christianity, who are ashamed of its peculiar excellencies and most essential attributes! Do we judge of our growth in grace, by the criterion here laid down? Do we become more and more abased in ourselves? Have we a deeper sense of the malignity of sin, and of our extreme depravity? Do we learn to trust, more unreservedly, to the help of God, and daily to maintain faith in the Redeemer, more firmly, for every blessing? Thus only shall we

prove our advancement in the divine life, and our progreſs towards heaven.

Jeſus, having mentioned one diſtinguiſhing part in the character of his people, proceeded to ſhew, what a tender regard ſhould be paid to them. He declared, that whatever favour was done unto any of them, though it were one as feeble as the infant in his arms, he would conſider it as done unto himſelf; but that a contempt of them, or a deliberate purpoſe to turn them out of the way, or interrupt them in their courſe, would be followed by a puniſhment, infinitely more tremendous than any temporal deſtruction. Alas! how many ſuch ſtumbling-blocks are laid before us, as not only obſtruct the weak, but prove fatal to the ſouls of thouſands! So circumſtanced, indeed, as we now are, theſe things are to be expected: by inevitable conſequence they will occur. But how provoking to God; how terrible the effects! "Wo unto the world, becauſe of offences! Wo to that man, by whom the offence cometh!"

Would you avoid the awful denunciation? Then beware, leſt there be ſomething in your temper and conduct, which may be the means of ſeducing others, or prejudicing their minds againſt the truth of God. Attend to what the Saviour has ſuggeſted in his ſolemn exhortation. Whatever gratification or proſpect of gain may obſtruct the great buſineſs of ſalvation, you muſt totally relinquiſh it, though as dear to you, and in your eſtimation as neceſſary, as a hand, a foot, or an eye. Do not heſitate, becauſe the mortification is painful. It were far better, ſurely, to ſuffer the ſever-

eſt

eſt operation, to cut off the hand or the foot, or to pluck out the eye, than expoſe yourſelves or others to eternal miſery. No inconvenience or diſtreſs, to which you can be called here, is to be compared to thoſe endleſs torments, which are reſerved for the ungodly. Does not the deſcription excite an horrible dread, while it is expreſsly declared, three times together, that in hell "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" The ſacrifices under the Moſaic law were ſprinkled with ſalt *; in alluſion to which it is aſſerted, that "every one," falling a ſacrifice to the juſtice of God, "ſhall be ſalted with fire;" and this repreſents the fierceneſs and durable nature of thoſe flames, to which the impenitent will be doomed. Would you eſcape them? The direction is clear: "every ſacrifice ſhall be ſalted with ſalt †;" that is, every one, truly devoted to God, and whom he will accept, muſt be conſecrated to his ſervice by his grace, which alone can purify and preſerve the ſoul. This is "the ſalt," which you muſt obtain; or elſe, notwithſtanding your religious profeſſion, you will be worthleſs and contemptible.

The ſubject being important, Jeſus continued to enforce an affectionate regard to the leaſt and meaneſt of his members. While he held the child in his arms, he obſerved, that we ought not to deſpiſe even ſuch an infant, upon which the very Angels are commiſſioned to attend: much leſs, then, ſhould we diſdain the weakeſt believers, (repreſented by the babe) to whom the higheſt orders of the exalted ſpirits before the throne

* Lev. ii. 13. † See Biſhop Hurd's Sermon on this text.

of God continually minister. Nay, to rescue them from destruction was the end, for which "the Son of man" came into the world. He is that "good Shepherd," who seeks the wandering sheep, and rejoices in its recovery, even more than in the rest of his flock, which are already secured within his fold. We, also, should possess a similar disposition; and, therefore, so far from obstructing the salvation of any soul, we should delight in promoting it.

Even a Christian brother may sometimes act inconsistently, and we may suffer through his misconduct. But we are not therefore rashly to abandon him, or indulge a vindictive temper. We are immediately to attempt his restoration, first by private admonitions, then by the interference of a few common friends, and, if that method should be ineffectual, by the more public censures of the religious community, to which we belong. It is only, when every effort fails, that we may proceed to the painful extremity, and renounce all fellowship with him. Perhaps, this expedient may be salutary; at least, it will be proper. And, that discipline might be maintained in his Church, our Lord has assured us, that the decisions of his ministers and people, acting in his name and from a regard to his glory, shall be ratified in heaven. Not only for the regulation of a Christian society, but for the encouragement of all to meet and offer their united prayers in a dependence upon him, he solemnly promised, that their petitions should be granted, and their assemblies honoured with his own immediate presence. Even for the smallest companies the blessing is intended. "There,"

"There," said he, "am I in the midst of them." How exalted is the language! How gracious the declaration! He can be no other than the Omnipotent Jehovah, who "filleth heaven and earth," since he engages to manifest himself in all the various places where his people meet, at the same moment of time. He speaks also in terms peculiar to the Deity, "I AM." Yet "as his majesty is, so is his mercy." He will not be unmindful of them, who seek him. Let them associate together in his name, professing their regard to him, and offer up their joint petitions, "with one mind and one mouth" pleading his merits, and they shall know, that he is in the midst of them, by the strength and comfort of his Spirit. Surely, the promise should enliven our affections, and enlarge our expectations, in his service.

As our Lord had insisted on the manner, in which dissensions between Christians should be healed, Peter took occasion to propose the enquiry, how often forgiveness should be extended to an offending brother, as if some limits should be affixed to the exercise of our patience and forbearance. But Jesus, in his reply, has taught us, that, if injuries should be multiplied against us without number, we should still be ready to pardon; not merely "until seven times, but until seventy times seven;" and even that our lenity to others should be as unbounded as that of God is towards us. This astonishing compassion and grace of our God is represented in an affecting parable. He is the great King, who "takes account of his servants," and to whom we are indebted in a larger sum, than we are able to compute.

compute. Should he rigorously demand payment, our case would indeed be desperate. Let us try the effect of an humble application to his mercy. He will not proceed in strict justice against us, if, under a deep conviction of our wretchedness, we cry, "Lord, have patience with us." He will instantly and freely remit the whole claim. Has he done this for us? And do we not feel a grateful sense of his goodness? Or, where is the person, who, with the hope of having received such a gracious discharge from his Lord, can retain sentiments of anger and revenge against an offending brother, who implores forgiveness? This strange inconsistency is exhibited in the character of the unmerciful man, who experienced such clemency from his Master, when his own debt was immense, and yet exacted from his poor fellow-servant, with extreme severity, the payment of a few paltry pence. So trifling are all the injuries, which we can possibly sustain from one another, compared with our manifold and heinous provocations against God. If, then, in the warmth of our resentment, we conclude, that our brother has no claim to our compassion, and we refuse to extend any mercy to him, what do we, but pass sentence upon ourselves? The indignation of the Lord, who had shewn so much tenderness, was roused against the inexorable wretch. "So likewise," said our divine Teacher, "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

How tremendous is the thought, that a malicious, cruel, and revengeful disposition is odious in the sight

of

of God, and, unrepented of, will bring down his heaviest displeasure! And how forcible an argument does it suggest for the exercise of mutual forbearance, candour, and love among Christians! "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you *."

* Eph. iv. 31 32.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 23.

Jesus reproached by his kindred—went to the feast of tabernacles—taught in the temple—miraculously preserved from the rage of the people, and from the officers of the Sanhedrim—appealed to, concerning an adulteress—renewed his public instructions—answered various cavils—asserted his Deity, and only by a miracle escaped a violent death.

It was a striking proof of the condescension of Jesus, and no small part of it, that he "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself*." That He, who "is Lord of all," should dwell in mortal flesh, was an instance of deep humiliation: yet he stooped still lower, in bearing the malicious insults and violent opposition of those, who were not only the creatures of his hands, but obnoxious to his wrath, and whom he might in a moment have confounded and destroyed for ever. He suffered their perverseness with unexampled patience, and laboured incessantly for their good. May his servants learn from him "to be gentle unto all men, and in meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves!"

* Heb. xii. 3.

It

It has been remarked, that our Lord continued to preach in Galilee; and it is accounted for by an Evangelist, who observes that he declined spending much time in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, because of the murderous designs, which were there formed against him *. At the approach of the feast of tabernacles †, though he intended to be present at the celebration of that solemnity, he delayed his journey for some days, that he might attract the less notice. But his brethren (which expression includes all those, who were nearly related), knowing his constant practice, wondered at this delay, and, with an insolent taunt, desired him to take that opportunity of going to display his works at Jerusalem. They meant to insinuate, that he courted popularity, and aimed at nothing more than the public applause. Never was any objection more groundless or more invidious than this. His whole deportment manifested a contrary disposition. But men with a malevolent heart, are capable of the basest misrepresentations. There were unbelievers, we perceive, among the kindred of Jesus, and probably in the same house with him, who, though witnesses of his exemplary holiness and miraculous operations, derided and rejected him. They, who dwell in a pious family, or, are intimately connected with a person eminently religious, enjoy peculiar advantages for their own spiritual improvement; but, even in so favourable a situation, they

* John vii. 1, &c.

† This was one of the grand annual festivals of the Jews, appointed in remembrance of their ancestors dwelling in tents, and kept for seven or eight days together in booths, which were built for that purpose. Lev. xxiii. 34.

may

may remain in ignorance and contempt of thofe principles, the excellency of which is continually before their eyes. We do not wonder, therefore, that the faithful fervants of Chrift are often fhamefully calumniated by thofe, who are nearly allied to them; efpecially as we obferve fuch malignant reproaches caft upon their Lord and Mafter.

Jefus replied, that he was aware, how much hatred he had incurred by his fevere reproofs, and, therefore, that he fhould not yet venture himfelf amongft his decided enemies. He further remarked, that this reafon need not detain them, fince their conduct was fo agreeable to the fpirit of the world, as to excite no difguft or malevolence. The obfervation accounts for all the violence of perfecution, which is raifed againft thofe, who boldly condemn the finful practices of their own times, and fhews alfo, that it may be avoided by a mean and fervile compliance with the general fentiments and manners. Perhaps, our Lord could not truft himfelf even in the company of his own relations; and therefore he followed them, after fome days, with the greateft privacy. Had he neglected this fervice, he would, probably, have been cenfured as a defpifer of religion: for there was an univerfal expectation of him at the feftival, and, as he did not appear at the beginning, there was much enquiry made concerning him. It is evident, then, that he was regular in his attendance on divine ordinances; thus he "fulfilled all righteoufnefs," and left a perfect example to his people. What refemblance of him do they bear, who neglect the facred inftitutions of God's houfe? Do not

their

their very excuſes convict them of profaneneſs, indolence, or avarice? To tread in his ſteps, we muſt carefully obſerve the appointed times and ſolemnities of public worſhip.

It might be, alſo, to avoid oſtentation as well as danger, that Jeſus travelled to Jeruſalem in private. Perhaps even there he concealed himſelf upon his firſt arrival; while warm debates were held concerning him, ſome allowing his integrity, others condemning him as a deceiver, and none daring to avow an attachment to him. But, about the midſt of the feſtival, he appeared in the temple, and delivered his holy inſtructions with an unſhaken firmneſs and intrepidity, through a pure zeal for the honour of God, and compaſſion for the ſouls of the numerous congregation then aſſembled. The Jews immediately perceived ſuch a depth of ſacred knowledge, as they could not account for, conſidering the meanneſs of his education. But he proceeded to declare, that he was inveſted with a commiſſion from heaven, and that his doctrine was not the fruit of human learning, or the deductions of reaſon, but a direct revelation from God. He obſerved that the evidences were ſuch as would convince an honeſt enquirer, and that the man, who was ſeriouſly diſpoſed to do the will of God, would certainly attain a right underſtanding of the truth, however obſcure or abſurd it might ſeem to others. As to himſelf, he maintained, that he ſought nothing but the divine glory, and therefore that they ſhould receive him, at leaſt, as no impoſtor.

 The

The Goſpel, then, which Jeſus taught, demands our unfeigned regard, becauſe it is a meſſage from God. Herein he ſtill preaches to us, as he did to the Jews of old. Let us examine, whether we "know of the doctrine." Are we perſuaded of its authority and excellence? Have we a clear perception of its grand deſign? And have we carefully traced its diſtinguiſhing lineaments? If otherwiſe, we ſhould ſuſpect in ourſelves an unſoundneſs of heart, a determined love of ſin, and a ſpirit of preſumptuous diſobedience to God. Theſe are the chief cauſes of infidelity and ignorance, where the truth of God is ſent: and it is generally evident, that men's difficulties and objections betray a perverſe and unholy diſpoſition.

Jeſus, by a bold appeal, accuſed his hearers of tranſgreſſing the law, of which they boaſted: ſome he even charged with harbouring deſigns of violence againſt his perſon. They denied the imputation, and inſolently reviled him for it, as if he were under the poſſeſſion of the devil. He, however, continued to aſſert, that their perſecution was moſt unreaſonable and malignant, ſince they made the cure of diſeaſed and impotent poverty, which he had performed on the ſabbath *, a plea for ſlander, rage, and murder. He ſhewed, how inconſiſtent it was, to condemn his miraculous work of mercy, which in fact broke not the law of the day, and on the ſame ſacred ſeaſon themſelves to practiſe the rite of circumciſion, out of regard to Moſes, who had appointed it, and yet was not its original founder. Why ſhould their deciſions be

* John v. 1—16.

regulated

regulated by appearances? Why would they not form a juſt and impartial judgment?

Many of the people were impreſſed with an admiration of his courage, eſpecially when they knew that there were ſerious intentions of deſtroying him; and yet they fooliſhly concluded, that he could not be the Meſſiah, becauſe his extraction ſeemed incompatible with that high character. To theſe captious adverſaries he replied, that, notwithſtanding their ſuppoſed acquaintance with him and his origin, he came to them with an expreſs and full commiſſion from that God, of whom they were ignorant, and with whom he had the moſt intimate communications. Alas! how many deceive themſelves, in boaſting of their clear perceptions of the divine nature, and their ſincere regard to the true God, while they reject or pervert the Goſpel! Their very objections to the ſcheme of ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt generally ariſe from groſs miſapprehenſions, or a fixed hatred, of God's righteous perfections. Let us be willing, that He, who alone hath known the Father, ſhould declare him unto us.

So pointed a reproof and ſuch high claims were more than they could bear. They were filled with rage, and were only prevented from acts of violence by a ſtrong impreſſion upon their minds, which reſtrained their malice. It was not poſſible, that they ſhould have power to deſtroy him, till the purpoſes of Heaven were accompliſhed. Yet there were many of the lower order, who ſeemed convinced that he was indeed the Chriſt; for they argued rightly, that the promiſed Deliverer could not perform more aſtoniſhing

operations, than Jeſus had done. Theſe favourable diſpoſitions in the people alarmed the great council of the Sanhedrim, which was then aſſembled; and officers were immediately ſent to apprehend him. But the malevolent deſign was baffled. Jeſus continued to preach, even before the face of thoſe, who were charged with a commiſſion to ſeize him. He warned them, that, notwithſtanding their oppoſition, he ſhould proceed in his work a little longer, that ſhortly, returning to the ſtate of glorious exaltation, which he had left, he ſhould be removed beyond the reach of their violence, and that they would ſeek in vain to be admitted into his preſence. How ſolemn the admonition! Alas! how few conſidered the time of their viſitation! How few, in our own day, conſider, that Jeſus, who waits upon them in the miniſtry of his word, will ſoon withdraw himſelf, that the gracious offers, now made, will never be renewed, and that an eternal ſeparation muſt take place between them and that Saviour, whom they deſpiſe! " Where He is, thither they cannot come."

While they were puzzled to comprehend his meaning, he proclaimed aloud the rich mercy of the Goſpel, inviting the application of all, who were truly deſirous of ſpiritual bleſſings. To ſuch perſons he promiſed to diſpenſe the abundant influences of the Holy Ghoſt, for their ſupport and refreſhment. He alſo deſcribed thoſe precious emanations, as proceeding from believers, and bleſſing their numerous connections, like ſtreams which ſcatter wide their plenty. This wondrous, this encouraging addreſs to the whole body of

the people was pronounced on the laſt day of the feaſt, at a time, when, it is probable, the aſſembly was larger than uſual; and when, as it is ſuppoſed, the officers of juſtice ſtood before him. On that day it was cuſtomary to fetch water from the fountain of Siloam, and pour it on the altar with great exultation. Perhaps, too, in teſtimony of this, they ſung at the time that remarkable ſentence, where the alluſion gives life to the deſcription of the prophet, "With joy ſhall ye draw water out of the wells of ſalvation *." It is thought, that upon this occaſion Jeſus ſtood on an eminence, and, exerting his voice that he might be heard by the ſurrounding multitudes, directed their attention to himſelf, as intended to be repreſented in that ceremony, as "the fountain of living waters," communicating the moſt plentiful ſupplies of grace to every thirſty ſoul.

To us, alſo, the ſame bleſſing is offered, the ſame kind invitation is given. His ambaſſadors ſtill addreſs us, with ſimilar propoſals, "Ho, every one that thirſteth, come ye to the waters †." The grand ſource, to which we are referred, remains inexhauſtible as ever; nor is there any thing to obſtruct our acceſs except our own indifference or averſion. "Let him that is athirſt, come: and whoſoever will, let him take the water of life freely ‡." Have we any ardent deſires for thoſe ſpiritual benefits, which Jeſus confers? It is well, if we be truly ſenſible of their excellence and importance. Let our application be made unto him, without delay, and with earneſt ſolicitation. He will not diſappoint

* Iſa. xii. 3. See Biſhop Lowth on that paſſage.
† Iſa. lv. 1. ‡ Rev. xxii. 17.

our wishes, but even exceed our largest expectations and conceptions: and perhaps, the mercy, which we receive, may be conveyed to others also, through our means, for their effectual relief and salvation.

These surprising declarations of Jesus excited various debates among the people. Some were disposed to honour him as a prophet, others to acknowledge him as the Christ; but, as they hastily concluded, that he was born in Galilee, it was argued that he could not fulfil the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah, and they were too careless or too bigotted to enter into further enquiries. The very men, who were employed to apprehend him, and some of whom were disposed to take him by force, listened to his words, till, under the strongest impressions of admiration and reverence, they were unable to execute their purpose. They returned without their prisoner, and were constrained to allege in excuse for not fulfilling their commission, "Never man spake like this man." How easily can the Lord God over-awe and confound his enemies! "Surely, the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain *." We have known many instances of those, who, unaccountably to themselves, have been suddenly obliged to relinquish their designs of violence, and even to plead the cause of persons, whom they had vowed to destroy. Not a few have been brought to a state of penitence, under a sermon, while they were seeking objections, and forming malevolent intentions against the preacher.

* Psal. lxxvi. 10.

The Sanhedrim, however, were the more exaſperated, and repreſented all, who favoured Jeſus, as ignorant, deluded, and infatuated wretches, not worthy to be regarded. Nicodemus attempted to moderate their rage; but he met with a ſevere rebuke for the prudent advice, which he ſuggeſted; and perhaps the council broke up in confuſion.

The evening approached, and Jeſus retired, not to indulge in ſenſuality or indolence, nor even to obtain the neceſſary refreſhment of ſleep. He withdrew to the mount of Olives, at ſome little diſtance from the city, where he might give vent to the ardent affections of his ſoul in ſecret prayer *. The night, therefore, as well as the day, was devoted to the ſervice of God, with a view, probably, to the ſalvation of ſinners, for whom he was moſt anxiouſly concerned. Let thoſe, who miniſter in holy things, be inſtructed from him, to mix the duties of private devotion with their public labours, if they wiſh to be ſupported and to proſper in their work.

Early in the morning he returned to the temple, and, not diſcouraged by the oppoſition he had met with, reſumed his employment, teaching the people with the ſame freedom as before. His inſidious adverſaries, alſo, renewed their attempts, with much vigilance and aſſiduity, though their former ſchemes were defeated. Some of the Scribes and Phariſees brought an adultereſs before him, and deſired his deciſion upon the caſe, whether or no ſhe ſhould be ſtoned, according to the Moſaic injunctions. Their intention was to reduce

* John viii. 1, &c.

him to a difficulty, and, from his judgment, whatever it might be, to prefer a ferious charge againft him. Had he pronounced fentence upon her, they would, probably, have accufed him as an enemy to the Roman government; or, if he had acquitted her, they might have calumniated him, as fubverting their law, and favouring the fin which fhe had committed. For fome time he feemed to pay no regard to their queftion; but, when they urged him to reply, he fhewed his knowledge of their hearts, and difplayed his power as well as wifdom, by confounding their purpofe. His anfwer was, "He that is without fin among you, let him firft caft a ftone at her:" and it was fuch a pointed application to their confciences, and fo forcibly impreffed, that it obliged them to depart, and thus tacitly to acknowledge their own guilt. Immediately, the gracious Redeemer difmiffed the poor criminal without condemnation; for he acted not as the civil magiftrate, and would not pronounce her offence unpardonable: but he folemnly admonifhed her to fin no more. Who, then, fhall prefume to contend with Him? "He difappointeth the devices of the crafty, fo that their hands cannot perform their enterprife *." But tranfgreffors, even of the moft atrocious kind, who tremble before him, need not defpair of his mercy. Only let them remember his falutary caution, nor dare, in any future inftance, to renew their wicked practices.

Jefus continued to deliver his inftructions to the people, ftill maintaining his own divine character, and exhibiting himfelf as the author of all fpiritual bleffings.

* Job v, 12.

Perhaps

Perhaps from the view of the ſun, then breaking forth upon them, he took occaſion to compare himſelf to that grand luminary, declaring, that only by a regard to him we can be reſcued from fatal deluſion, and conducted in the paths of peace and joy to a ſtate of eternal bleſſedneſs above. As the feſtival was ended, many of his hearers, probably, were preparing to return to their reſpective abodes, and their common occupations. The brightneſs of the day was the traveller's opportunity; but Jeſus exhorted him to remember the preſence of a better light, which would never leave him benighted. Are our eyes, then, directed unto Him, as the only ſource of wiſdom, ſtrength, and comfort to the ſoul? Do we diſcover any glory in him, which may properly, though inadequately, be repreſented by that moſt reſplendent body in the firmament? Do we walk by his light; or are the benefits which we receive from him, adequate to ſuch an exalted deſcription as this?

It was objected, that his doctrine reſted merely on his own aſſertion, and therefore could not be credited. But he replied, that ſufficient teſtimony of his high character had been already given, and that they condemned him through the influence of carnal prejudices. He argued alſo, that his declarations demanded their implicit aſſent, as he had produced the ſtrongeſt proofs of his Father's preſence with him; but that, while they cavilled at his claims, they ſhewed their entire ignorance of his Father, as well as of him. This was a bold charge indeed; and, conſidering his ſituation and their malevolence, it was wonderful, that they bore it. But

they

they were ſtill under an inviſible reſtraint; as the full time for his being delivered into their hands was not arrived. He continued, therefore, to warn them, that he ſhould ſhortly leave them to periſh in their unbelief, and that then it would be too late to ſolicit an admiſſion into his preſence. When they turned his very warning into ridicule, he declared more plainly, that he deſcended from the heavenly world, and properly belonged to it; but that they were entirely earthly in their views, affections, and purſuits, and that by rejecting him they would ſink under the curſe of their ſins into final deſtruction.

Ah! how fooliſh as well as wicked is the conduct of thoſe, who perſiſt in oppoſing the Saviour, to their own inevitable ruin! They trifle away their precious moments, in raiſing one petulant objection after another, while they ſtand on the brink of eternal miſery. Should we not deſire to rouſe them from their lethargy? What mean your indifference and levity? Have you forgotten that the grand concerns of your ſouls are ſtill unſecured? Inſtead of replying to your ſubtleties, we would faithfully denounce "the terrors of the Lord," and entreat you without delay to believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, leſt you "die in your ſins."

Still unwilling to admit, perhaps deriding, his claims, ſome inſolently aſked, whom he pretended to be. He confirmed his former aſſertions, and replied, that though he had many charges to bring againſt them, he ſhould only for the preſent maintain, that he acted by a ſacred commiſſion, and delivered no other doctrine, than what he had received from the Father. Yet,

plain as these declarations were, the people, blinded by their prejudices, did not comprehend his meaning. He, however, foretold, that, after taking him off by the violent death of the cross, they would be struck with a conviction of his divine character and high office; and he solemnly assured them, that, though rejected and scorned by sinners, he was not deserted of his heavenly Father, but was the constant object of his complacency and delight. O let us fear to indulge a captious disposition, lest we be given up to a reprobate mind! Is not this exalted Teacher "worthy of all acceptation?" Why, then, do we not sincerely and thankfully submit to his instructions? Does not our perverse opposition evince a proud and an earthly mind?

His bold and serious harangue, though generally despised, produced an evident impression on some of the company, who, therefore, professed to regard him as the Messiah. Addressing himself to these persons in particular, he exhorted them to yield a steadfast and persevering attention to his word, and thereby to prove themselves, beyond a doubt, his faithful disciples. He subjoined a most gracious promise, that in this way they should be enlightened with such a knowledge of his doctrine, as would establish them in a state of glorious freedom. Yet so captious were the multitude, that even this very promise gave offence. His proposal of conferring freedom implied, that they had been in servitude; which they resented as a gross insult, boasting of their high privileges as the children of Abraham. Their proud and ignorant objection, however, led him

to

to ſhew, that his meaning was ſpiritual; and he replied to the following effect:

" Little as you may be aware of the melancholy truth, I ſolemnly aſſure you, that every one, practiſing iniquity, is actually a ſlave to ſin, the worſt of tyrants. So circumſtanced, then, notwithſtanding your deſcent from Abraham, you are not the children of God, and may expect to be excluded from his houſhold. But I, his only begotten Son, who am entitled to all the honours of his family, am empowered likewiſe to confer them upon you; ſo that, if you receive the liberty which I beſtow, you will be reſcued from a ſtate of miſerable bondage, and the moſt exalted privileges be ſecured to you for ever. You boaſt and I allow your extraction from an illuſtrious Patriarch: but his genuine offspring are not, as you are, incenſed at my doctrine, nor filled with a murderous rage againſt me. My word has place in them, though not in you. I declare the will of my Father, that which I know to be ſo, from the moſt intimate acquaintance with his mind: and you alſo ſhew by your deportment, what you have learned from your father."

Here they interrupted him, ſtill maintaining that they ſprang from no other than Abraham. But Jeſus proceeded;—" Were you indeed the children of Abraham, you would tread in his ſteps: but how widely do you differ from him in your ſpirit and conduct, while you are aiming at my life, for boldly aſſerting among you the truth of God! Your actions correſpond with the original, from which you are derived." This inſinuation they conſidered as reproachful to their character,

racter, and contended that God was their Father. The Saviour answered;—"If such were your near relation to God, you would discover an affectionate regard to me, who am his immediate offspring, and have received my commission from him alone. To what shall I ascribe your ignorance of my meaning, but to your carnal dispositions, which have effectually stopped your ears against me? You, therefore, belong to another family, and are evidently the children of the wicked one, whose very tempers you betray: he has been uniformly seeking the destruction of mankind, and, by the basest treachery and falshood, opposing divine truth; he is the parent of murder and of lies. You reject me, merely because I have faithfully declared to you the counsel of God. I dare appeal to you, prejudiced as you are, that you cannot bring any charge of guilt against me: and, if you must admit my integrity, why will you not credit my assertions? Every one, who is born of God, and under the influence of his grace, will yield a serious attention and an unreserved submission to his will, in whatever manner it be revealed: this, therefore, cannot be your character, as you prove by your perverse and obstinate unbelief."

These severe reproofs exasperated the Jews still more, so that they replied with manifest rancour, that they were now justified in their suspicions of him, as being an enemy to their religion, like the Samaritans, and acting under the instigation of the devil. He repelled the blasphemous charge with singular meekness, observing, that so far from having connections with Satan, he had uniformly shewn, what had brought their contempt

contempt upon him, a zealous regard to his Father's glory; that, though he might be indifferent about his own perſonal honour, yet there was One, who would aſſert it to their entire condemnation. He added, alſo, the moſt gracious and ſolemn proteſtations, for the encouragement of the penitent, that the ſincere believer in him ſhould never taſte the bitterneſs, or come under the power, of death. The precious promiſe, no leſs than his reproofs, incenſed them, and confirmed them in the perſuaſion, that he was actuated by a diabolical influence. They groſsly miſapprehended him, as if none of his followers ſhould ſuffer even the diſſolution of the body, and inſolently aſked, what privilege or dignity he claimed, beyond the ancient prophets.

He anſwered, "If my claims were unſupported, they might ſafely be deſpiſed; but I appeal to the atteſtations of that God, to whom you profeſs to ſtand in a peculiar relation. Alas! your pretences are falſe and preſumptuous: on the contrary, I poſſeſs the moſt perfect knowledge of him, and yield a conſtant and exact obedience to him. You reject me with ſcorn; but Abraham, your great progenitor, ſhewed the higheſt poſſible reſpect for my character, looking forwards with ardent deſires to the day of my appearance, and, by faith, exulting in the proſpect." Thus he plainly declared himſelf to be the Meſſiah, whilſt they continued moſt fooliſhly to carp at his expreſſions, as implying that he had been cotemporary with Abraham upon the earth. To give the moſt deciſive anſwer to their cavils, and to aſſert his own Deity, in expreſs and unequivocal terms he added, while he called their attention

tion as to a certain and interefting truth, " Before Abraham was, I AM." This language was too clear to be mifunderftood, and it contains a doctrine too important to be abandoned. The very mode of fpeaking, which he adopted, is peculiar to the Godhead; and it amounts to a full proof, that he is the unchangeable Jehovah, who remains " the fame" from everlafting to everlafting, and, therefore, that the ages and generations of men make no difference in his exiftence. He affirmed, then, that he is that very God, who revealed himfelf to Mofes by that adorable name, " I AM *." In this fenfe, it fhould feem, they received it; for immediately, conceiving him to be guilty of blafphemy, as he would have been on the fuppofition of his mere humanity, they prepared to ftone him; and he efcaped from their fury, only by a miracle, concealing himfelf from their obfervation, while he withdrew from the tumultuous affembly.

How remarkable was the whole of this debate! It exhibits a ftriking reprefentation of the blindnefs and perverfenefs of finners, as alfo of the meeknefs and condefcenfion of the Saviour. Thofe, whofe office calls them to maintain and propagate the Gofpel, may expect a fimilar oppofition from men, who are deftitute of the truth. Probably, the moft unreafonable prejudices will fo prevail, as greatly to obftruct their ufefulnefs. Their plaineft expreffions may be mifunderftood, or wilfully diftorted; the moft malicious charges may be urged againft them, and their characters blackened by the bafeft afperfions. All this may be done, even

* Exod. iii. 14.

among

among the people, for whoſe eternal welfare they are labouring with the moſt generous and unwearied aſſiduity. But let them ſtudy, and endeavour to copy, this divine exemplar. Like the bleſſed Jeſus, it will become them to ſtand unmoved againſt all the aſſaults of ignorance, pride, and envy, to obviate miſtakes, and inculcate right doctrines, with patience and forbearance. Yet, conſiſtently with this gentleneſs of ſpirit, they ſhould alſo warn the impenitent, and without fear or reſerve denounce "the terrors of the Lord." They ſhould reprove and admoniſh, not with raſhneſs or malevolence, but with courage and fidelity, and while they plainly repreſent the ſtate and character of the ungodly, affectionately beſeech them "to flee from the wrath to come."

Would to God, that oppoſition to Chriſt had been confined to the Jews! Are there none among us, who in a ſimilar way reſiſt the truth? How vile their affections! How wretched their condition! They may boaſt of liberty, but "they are the ſervants of corruption." They may ſuppoſe, that they are doing God ſervice, and be ready to demand a recompenſe from him, even while they fulfil the purpoſes of Satan, and prove themſelves to be totally under his influence. They may pretend to a peculiar penetration and diſcernment, when they are deluded by "the father of lies," and, through the aſcendency of carnal principles, "cannot hear" the pure doctrine of the Goſpel. Let us pray, that we may not be given up to ſuch infatuation.

Do we, then, believe in Jeſus, as he is here exhibited? Do we triumph in that Saviour, whom Abraham

beheld with joy? Do we trust in him, adore, praise, and serve him, as being no other than JEHOVAH, the great "I AM," "God over all, blessed for ever?" Surely, his character will justify our strongest confidence. Let us not renounce our faith, or be ashamed of our attachment. He himself exhorts us "not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel." How animating are his promises to those, who "continue in his word!" He will afford us increasing knowledge of his truth, gradually dispersing the darkness of our minds; he will break off the fetters, in which sin has long held us captive, and bring us into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He will even disarm death of its terrors, enable us to smile in the near prospect of it, and give us a perfect and everlasting deliverance. May every reader, then, possess such a firm and unshaken dependence upon him, as to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day *!" Amen.

* 2 Tim. i. 12.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 24.

Jesus sent out seventy disciples to preach—received and addressed them upon their return—replied to the captious lawyer, and delivered the parable of the good Samaritan—visited Martha and Mary at Bethany—taught and encouraged his disciples to pray—dined with a Pharisee, and gave the most severe reproofs.

In this practical review of the life of Jesus, it is intended to introduce the principal occurrences according to their regular order, where it can be ascertained; but on some occasions we may be allowed to depart from it, for a more convenient division of the subject into different sections. It is not of so much importance to arrange and harmonize the four Gospels, as to obtain a right knowledge of the glorious character there delineated, and participate the rich blessings proposed to us.

As Jesus designed to take one more journey through Galilee, he chose out a large company of assistants, whom he sent before to every town, which he himself meant to visit, that, by their preaching, a serious attention might be excited among the people, and their minds disposed to receive him upon his personal appearance.

pearance *. The twelve Apostles had already gone forth with his commission, and now he selected SEVENTY other persons, the exact number fixed on for the relief of Moses in his office †. These also He divided into pairs, that they might strengthen each other's hands; and, upon their departure, he gave them instructions similar to those, which he had delivered to the Apostles. This appointment, probably, took place before his attendance at the feast of tabernacles, last mentioned.

He addressed them to the following purpose: "Unite your fervent prayers, for more labourers to be sent out into the very extensive field, which lies before you, that the harvest may be gathered in; for, though a large addition is now made, there is sufficient work to call for a further increase. And, as none should presume to intrude themselves into this employment, your application should be to the great Lord of the harvest, who alone can discern the proper persons, and furnish them with all necessary preparations for the sacred function. You go forth under my directions "as lambs among wolves," in the face of furious adversaries, who will endeavour to harass and destroy you. But commit yourselves to the care of divine Providence; nor take with you any supplies for your temporal support. Like men in haste, who are dispatched upon urgent business, you are to lose no time in vain compliments ‡: yet neglect not to give the strongest proofs of your benevolence, by praying for every family, which you visit: and You at least, if not They, shall receive the benefit. Whatever entertainment

* Luke x. 1, &c. † Num. xi. 16. ‡ 2 Kings iv. 29.

may be offered, you will not ſcruple to accept it, as the wages earned by your labour; but remove not from one houſe to another for your own indulgence, or in ſearch of better accommodations. In confirmation of your doctrine, and as an intimation of its benign tendency, I now inveſt you with full powers to heal the ſick; but at the ſame time you muſt proclaim the approach of the Saviour, coming to eſtabliſh his kingdom. While you depart from the people, who deſpiſe your meſſage, ſolemnly warn them of their ſin and danger: ſince aggravated ruin will come upon them, for their contempt of mercy. The curſe of an incenſed God awaits the inhabitants of thoſe cities, which have ſcornfully rejected my miniſtry; and, however exalted their privileges have been, they ſhall finally periſh with a much more tremendous deſtruction, than even thoſe abandoned places, Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, which have already felt the weight of divine vengeance. Thus, alſo, I ſhall conſider myſelf, and my Almighty Father likewiſe, either as regarded or contemned by the perſons, among whom you ſhall diſcharge your embaſſy; and upon their conduct towards you their everlaſting ſalvation or perdition will depend."

What eager ſolicitude, what a generous concern did Jeſus diſcover for the welfare of mankind! What various methods he deviſed, to ſave immortal ſouls! He ſent out, we obſerve, a numerous company of harbingers and heralds, proclaiming pardon and peace, and he himſelf took one laborious journey after another, for the ſame benevolent purpoſe. Nor was his love leſs conſpicuous, when he warned the deſpiſers of his Goſpel,

Gospel, that the most tremendous woes were coming upon them; for he poured out his heart in deep distress on their account. Still he presides as Head over his Church; and still, with a view to rescue sinners from eternal misery, he raises up and employs many ambassadors in his service, to whom he "commits the word of reconciliation." And, as it seems most probable, that he will promote the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth by means of faithful and evangelical ministers, we should unite our prayers to him for their increase, that by their testimony his name may be declared from town to town, and from one kingdom to another. Where he sends his messengers, we are encouraged to hope, that he himself will soon appear, for the advancement of his own glory. Yes; he will be present to support and prosper them in their arduous and important work. He has promised, "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world *."

We would, therefore, entreat those, among whom this proclamation of mercy is made, to consider, how much depends upon it. "It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life †." If it be not effectual to save you, it will aggravate your condemnation. Those, who "watch for your souls," will finally witness either for or against you, according to the reception, which you give to their words. They are the representatives of their adorable Lord and Master, who will shortly arise to vindicate his own cause: and how will you meet him, if you treat his gracious proposals with scorn or indifference?

* Mat. xxviii. 20.

† Deut. xxxii. 47.

The feventy difciples returned to Jefus, perhaps about the feaft of tabernacles, with an account of their miniftry. They appeared to be elated, as having fucceeded beyond their expectation, and expreffed their grateful furprife, becaufe the very devils were fubject to them through his name, as if nothing, from that time, fhould be able to ftand againft them. Jefus himfelf, alfo, triumphed in the downfal of Satan, not only as approving the punifhment inflicted on him for his original apoftafy, but as forefeeing the ruin of his intereft and kingdom in the world to be approaching. He promifed, therefore, to confirm to his difciples the miraculous powers, which they had exercifed, and to fupport them againft every fnare and danger. But, left they fhould "be exalted above meafure" through their diftinguifhed privileges, he reminded them, that thefe were comparatively of little worth, and that it was a far greater caufe of thankfulnefs and joy to be admitted into the family of God, and enrolled among the heirs of heaven, than to poffefs the moft abfolute dominion over the infernal fpirits.

On this occafion, the Saviour exulted in his heart, and broke forth into expreffions of grateful fatisfaction, from the profpect of what thefe feeble inftruments fhould accomplifh, though oppofed by perfons of confummate wifdom and prudence. But how profound the myftery! Salvation is revealed to thofe, who are weak and of as little account as babes, while men of admired abilities and high rank remain in ignorance and contempt of it. In this infcrutable difpenfation, Jefus acquiefced and rejoiced. The Lord God is a

righteous

righteous Sovereign; and, under a full conviction of his equity, we should submit implicitly to his appointments, though we see not the reasons of them. It should suffice us, that "so it seemed good in his sight."

Jesus took that opportunity, also, to direct the regard of his disciples to himself, as united with the Father in the grand economy of grace, as possessing an extent of power and understanding, far beyond the reach of any creature, and as the only One, who, from his own immediate and intuitive knowledge, can declare the nature and will of God. Then likewise, to excite their thankfulness for being acquainted with him, he congratulated them, apart from the rest, because they were favoured with higher privileges and clearer discernment in divine things, than many of the most eminent characters in old times, prophets and kings, who were beloved of God.

And are not our obligations immense, if we "have obtained like precious faith," and can on solid ground conclude, that our "names are written in the book of life?" For, "how great things hath God done for us!" We need not envy those, who were invested even with the apostolical commission and miraculous powers. That grace, which is infinitely more valuable, is bestowed upon us. Our distinguished felicity appears the more remarkable, when we observe that many are destitute of it, who in every other respect are far advanced above us. Are we the "babes," to whom God "hath revealed these things?" The reason must be sought, not in us, but in his unsearchable counsels. Surely in the contemplation of this mercy, we shall cry out, with

wonder, love, and praiſe, "Even ſo, Father, for ſo it ſeemed good in thy ſight." Let us alſo pray for thoſe, who are yet in darkneſs, that they may partake of our happineſs, by being "called into marvellous light:" that their eyes may be bleſſed, in beholding the glory and excellency of our Redeemer.

During ſome part of our Lord's addreſs to the ſeventy upon their return, it ſhould ſeem that he was ſurrounded by a large company. Among the reſt was a certain lawyer, one of thoſe who ſtudied and expounded the law of Moſes. He, profeſſing ſome regard, but deſigning to involve him in a difficulty, came forward, and propoſed a queſtion. It is likely, that he felt much ſelf-confidence, or entertained a ſecret contempt of Jeſus, while he begged to be informed, what he muſt do, for the attainment of eternal life. The ſubject is indeed important above all others; and, had the information been aſked with an humble, teachable diſpoſition, Jeſus would not have refuſed a direct and explicit anſwer. But, as he knew the proud and captious temper of the man, he replied in a way, which might tend to humble or ſilence him. He referred him to the demands of the law (upon his obedience to which the Scribe placed his dependence), aſſuring him, that an entire compliance with thoſe claims, of perfect love both to God and man, would entitle him to the bleſſedneſs of heaven, as the juſt recompenſe of his deeds; "This do, and thou ſhalt live:" as if he had ſaid, "Perform, in their utmoſt extent, without diminution or interruption, all the injunctions of God's righteous commands, and a ſure and everlaſting reward will await thee: but

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the leaſt deviation or defect will expoſe thee to condemnation *."

In the ſame manner it may be proper to treat all ſuch perſons, as value themſelves on their ſuppoſed goodneſs. This method ſeems calculated to convince them of their ignorance and preſumption; ſo that the law may ſerve "as a ſchoolmaſter to bring them unto Chriſt, that they may be juſtified by faith †." We aſk, if your hopes are built on your own duties, are you aware, how much is required of you? Have you never failed of loving God ſupremely and fervently, with all your heart, ſoul, ſtrength, and mind; or your neighbour as yourſelves? If theſe diſpoſitions have had their conſtant and full influence upon you, from your earlieſt moments to this preſent hour, you need not implore mercy, or be indebted to the Saviour: on the ground of juſtice, according to "the law of works," you may expect and even claim eternal life. But does not this very repreſentation awaken your fears, rather than flatter your pride, or confirm your vain confidence?

What effect was produced upon the Scribe? He was neither humbled nor ſilenced; but, ſtill deſirous to ſtand upon his own defence, and perhaps in order to evade conviction, he propoſed another queſtion, "Who is my neighbour?" From this circumſtance our Lord took occaſion to confute the erroneous notion, then generally prevalent, that neighbours included only particular friends, and ſuch as were ſituated near to each other, or connected by the bonds of kindred or religion. The ſenſe of the law was confined within a nar-

* See Gal. iii. 10—13. † 24.

row compaſs, while it was thought, that none but perſons of this deſcription only have any claim upon our benevolence. Jeſus, however, ſhewed, that we are indiſpenſably required to extend our utmoſt kindneſs to all our fellow-creatures in diſtreſs, of whatever nation or profeſſion, though ſeparated from us, or even incenſed againſt us, by party quarrels or diſtinctions. This he did, in the parable of the good Samaritan, an affecting and inſtructive little hiſtory, the circumſtances of which are ſo naturally combined, and related with ſuch ſimplicity, that it cannot fail to intereſt every reader.

A Jew is repreſented as reduced to the moſt calamitous and dangerous condition, through the violence of robbers. Two men of ſacred character, a Prieſt and a Levite, travelling the ſame road, were witneſſes of his miſery; and, though their office, in an eſpecial manner, ſhould have diſpoſed them to every act of tenderneſs and compaſſion, they turned away from the painful ſight, without even attempting his relief. But a Samaritan, who was taught from his earlieſt years to hate and avoid the Jews, felt commiſeration, upon the firſt view of the wretched object. Forgetting the odious contentions between the two nations, he ran to his aſſiſtance, and, with peculiar kindneſs, made effectual proviſion for his ſupport. Such a conduct was the ſtrongeſt proof of benevolence. He bound up the wounds of a ſtranger in misfortune, and ſupplied the neceſſities of a plundered enemy. Even this bigotted Scribe was conſtrained to admire the Samaritan, and

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to confeſs that he had ſhewn himſelf a neighbour indeed.

The proper application is pointed out. To each of us, as well as to the lawyer, the Saviour ſays, "Go, and do thou likewiſe." There cannot be a more delicate or more forcible reproof of a cruel, covetous, and narrow mind; or a more ſtriking repreſentation of the neceſſity and happy effects of an enlarged charity. How unbounded, how active, and generous ſhould our love be! But do we really appear to poſſeſs ſuch a diſpoſition? Where are the fruits? Do we not betray a proud, contracted, and unfeeling ſpirit? Are we not reſtrained from doing good, ſometimes by ſelfiſhneſs, ſometimes by malevolence? Alas! who can ſay, that he has uniformly looked upon all men as his neighbours, and treated them with the ſame kindneſs, which he ſhould expect for himſelf in ſimilar circumſtances? How little do we reſemble our great Pattern, who has exhibited the moſt extenſive and diſintereſted benevolence! The Lord Jeſus "remembered us in our low eſtate," and, though we were "ſinners and enemies," not only ſtretched out his arm to reſcue us from miſery, but gave himſelf a ſacrifice, and "died for the ungodly *." May the contemplation of this love excite us to "love one another, with a pure heart fervently †!"

At Bethany, about two miles diſtant from Jeruſalem, lived an amiable family, to which our Lord ſeems to have been much attached. It was probably upon his return from the feaſt of tabernacles, that he called at

* Rom. v. 6—10. † 1 Pet. i. 22.

this village, to visit Lazarus and his sisters. The interview is mentioned, chiefly that we may remark the different kinds of attention, which these two pious women paid to Jesus. They both received him with great affection. Mary placed herself at his feet, like an humble scholar, with an eager desire to imbibe his important instructions. But Martha, to whom perhaps the chief care of their domestic affairs belonged, discovered her regard to him, by her solicitude to provide a proper entertainment. The latter, however, being too intent upon that object, complained with some marks of peevishness, that her sister did not help her. Their visitant, upon this, with much tenderness reproved Martha for her unseasonable and immoderate anxiety about the various concerns of the family, or the preparing of such accommodations, as were trifling, if not needless, and at the same time solemnly reminded her, that, while many lower matters engaged her attention and distracted her thoughts, "one thing" was of absolute necessity, and that all others should give place to it. On this ground he commended the conduct of Mary, who appeared to be more "spiritually minded," as improving the opportunity for her own greatest advantage. He declared, that Mary had acted wisely in preferring "the good part," because it is excellent in itself, and infinitely more valuable than all earthly possessions. It is, what they are not, secure and inviolable.

The example as well as the observations of Jesus upon this occasion will furnish solid instruction. We should learn from him to shew the influence of our religion,

ligion, as well in our common intercourſe with each other, as in the temple and cloſet. In every houſe, where he was admitted, he delivered his heavenly doctrines, "his mouth ſpeaking wiſdom, and his tongue talking of judgment *." And ſhall we be unwilling or aſhamed to introduce any mention of our ſpiritual concerns, wherever we may be? How do we appear to have the mind of Chriſt, if divine things engage no part of our private converſation? Do not ſome plead the cares of a family, the hurry of buſineſs, and an attention to company, as if theſe were of the firſt conſequence, or as if God were to be regarded, and the intereſts of the ſoul conſulted, only in the ſecond place? What, then, has Jeſus taught you? He declares, "One thing is needful:" but how many things are ſo in your eſtimation! That, which he enjoins you, as important above all others, is either totally forgotten, or thruſt aſide, that you may be more at leiſure to purſue what is of little worth, and cannot long be ſecured. Even ſome pious perſons are much obſtructed in their ſpiritual progreſs through an exceſſive anxiety about their ſecular affairs. They do not, therefore, as they ought, glorify God by bringing forth fruit abundantly, nor do they enjoy the comforts of religion in themſelves. But the greater part of mankind ſeem entirely carnal; for they propoſe no higher object to themſelves, than to gratify their animal nature; as if "the one thing needful" were, to make the moſt of the preſent life, to eat, drink, and be merry. A zealous regard to religion is condemned and derided, as extreme folly,

* Pſal. xxxvii. 30.

though it be the trueſt wiſdom. The ſervant of Jeſus, who is obſerved to "ſit at his feet and hear his word," is complained of as deſerting his poſt. But his divine Maſter will plead his cauſe to the confuſion of his opponents; and, when they ſhall be for ever ſeparated from all that is now dear to them, he will poſſeſs a treaſure and a happineſs in the heavens, "which ſhall not be taken away from him."

On another occaſion, and in a different place, where Jeſus had retired, he was requeſted by one of his diſciples, at the concluſion of his devotions, to teach them to pray, as John alſo had taught his followers *. It cannot be ſuppoſed, that they had continued ſo long with him in ignorance or neglect of this duty: for they muſt have learned the neceſſity of it both from his example and his exhortations. But they now deſired ſome particular inſtructions, perhaps ſome form of prayer to be delivered to them; and it is ſuppoſed, that the moſt eminent Jewiſh maſters, as well as John the Baptiſt, gave their reſpective ſcholars and adherents a ſhort model for their worſhip. In compliance with their wiſhes, then, he repeated, with certain trifling alterations, that brief but comprehenſive addreſs to God, with which he had furniſhed them before, as a directory for their devotions; and now he appointed it to be uſed as a ſtated form †.

It has been already obſerved, that it might be adapted to the peculiar ſituation of the diſciples, and intended only for that period. We could not, however, at the ſame time help remarking, that, as the expreſſions

* Luke xi. 1—13.

† See Sect. 10.

are

are ſuitable for Chriſtians in all ages and circumſtances, it may ſtill be retained with great propriety, both in public and private worſhip, though not to the excluſion of other petitions. The compoſition is wonderful and excellent, beyond any commendation which we can offer. We call upon thoſe, who deſire to ſerve God acceptably, to ſtudy the full ſenſe of all its parts diſtinctly, and endeavour to enter into its true ſpirit. Conſider, how you pray. You are here taught to approach to God with affection and confidence as to your Father, yet with profound reverence as to him, who "hath prepared his throne in the heavens." His name ſhould be dear to you; and you ſhould implore grace for others, that it may be known and ſanctified in every place, requeſting alſo, that he would eſtabliſh his kingdom in righteouſneſs by the everlaſting Goſpel, and that all the inhabitants of the earth may unite with thoſe of heaven, in yielding him a cheerful and perfect obedience. Looking up in faith, you muſt aſk your daily ſupport from him. You muſt confeſs to him your numerous and aggravated offences, humbly ſeeking his forgiveneſs, and declaring your readineſs to pardon every injury, received from your fellow-creatures. Yet, as you will be conſtantly expoſed to freſh temptations, entreat him to ſtrengthen and preſerve you by the power of his Spirit, and to reſcue you out of the hands of your enemy.

Such are the ſupplications, which you are taught to offer; but you ſhould pray, as perſons in earneſt, who are unwilling to take a denial. Our Lord aſſures you, that, as one man prevails upon another, if not by argu-

ment or through the influence of friendſhip, yet by his inceſſant ſolicitation, you alſo, by the fervour and importunity of your requeſts, may have power with God, and obtain his bleſſing. The promiſes of Jeſus for your ſucceſs are abſolute and inviolable. No inſtance can be produced, of any one continuing to wait upon God with unwearied diligence and ardent devotion, who was finally rejected. You are encouraged to expect a favourable anſwer, from God's parental diſpoſition. If you feel the affection of a father, what would you not grant to your beloved offspring, who earneſtly entreat your aſſiſtance? You, indeed, who are "evil," may eaſily be warped from your duty, under the influence of corrupt paſſions; yet you cannot refuſe to relieve your children. And ſhall God with-hold any thing really good, from thoſe who ſend up their unceaſing petitions to him? No: he will give them his Holy Spirit, which will "fulfil all the good pleaſure of his goodneſs." But, ah! how cold, how lifeleſs are your prayers, if the duty be at all attempted! Shall you complain, or wonder, that you ſucceed no better? Will you not be rouſed to greater fervour? But, if you "reſtrain prayer before God," and call not upon his name, your guilt is extreme; and his tender mercies, in waiting to be gracious, will render you the more inexcuſable.

It may be difficult, nor is it of any real importance, to aſcertain the exact connection of the following narrative. But at another time, when Jeſus was delivering his inſtructions to the people, he received an invitation to dinner from a Phariſee, which he immediately accepted

accepted with his general affability and condescension*. It should seem from the sequel, and from the manner of our Lord's address, that a scheme was formed to ensnare him, and that for this purpose a large company of his usual opponents was collected together. But their malicious project was baffled; and they met with a most severe reprehension for their odious hypocrisy, and the numerous inconsistencies of their conduct.

Jesus sat down to eat without observing the common ceremony of washing his hands: when the master of the house, who narrowly watched him, secretly condemned him for the neglect. Our Lord was aware of the objection, though it was not avowed; and therefore he took the opportunity, not so much of vindicating himself, as of exposing the folly and dissimulation of the Pharisees in general. Many were then before him, and yet with remarkable plainness and courage he reproved them, while he detected their avarice and oppression, their pride and malignity of heart. He pointed out their absurdity, in paying such scrupulous attention to external purifications, while their minds were filled with schemes of rapine and various kinds of wickedness. He exhorted them to consider, that the God, who made them, would not be satisfied with any outward observances, and that their great object should be to approve themselves to him. He urged them to renounce their covetousness and cruel exactions, and to be kind and liberal to the poor; in which way their food would be much more effectually sanctified to them, than merely by the cleansing of their hands.

* Luke xi. 37, &c.

Their danger was not to be concealed; and there-fore, that they might no longer flatter themſelves, he addreſſed them in language the moſt authoritative and majeſtic, and denounced againſt them one tremendous wo upon another, for their neglect of real and inward holineſs while they boaſted of their formalities. He ex-poſed, alſo, their oſtentation and ambition, and their egregious hypocriſy, by which ſo many were deceived to their utter ruin.

Jeſus having included the Scribes in one of his re-proofs, a perſon then preſent, belonging to that profeſ-ſion, expreſſed ſome degree of warmth, that they, too, ſhould be ſo ſeverely cenſured. But, neither fearing their anger nor courting their favour, he proceeded to condemn them for enjoining ſo many burdenſome rites upon the people, by their abſurd interpretations and traditions, while they themſelves obſerved not their own precepts. They pretended a regard for the an-cient prophets, and built the tombs of the men, whom their fathers had ſlain. But, as they inherited the cruel and perſecuting diſpoſition of their anceſtors, they were convicted of the groſſeſt hypocriſy; and the very ſe-pulchres, which they erected, witneſſed againſt them. Jeſus, therefore, knowing what was in their hearts, and what terrible conſequences would follow from their violent oppoſition to the Apoſtles and peachers of the Goſpel, ſolemnly declared, that God, in righteous judg-ment, would ſhortly reckon with that generation, and bring the moſt awful deſolations upon them, for all the blood of his martyred ſaints, which had been ſhed from the foundation of the world. Theſe perverſe ex-

pounders

pounders of the law had to anſwer likewiſe for the general ignorance of the people. By their falſe though ſpecious comments, they locked up the grand treaſury of divine knowledge, and prevented others from receiving the Saviour. How great an aggravation of their own guilt! How could it be otherwiſe, than that the curſe of God ſhould reſt upon them?

Such were the reproofs of Jeſus, ſuited, no doubt, to the ſtate and temper of his hearers. It is not for us, who poſſeſs not his information or authority, to thunder out anathemas in the ſame manner. But his miniſters, ſurely, ſhould learn from him to be bold and ſtrenuous in rebuking ſin, and to declare, without reſpect of perſons, that "the wrath of God cometh on the children of diſobedience *." Very frequent occaſions call for language of this kind: for how numerous is the company of groſs offenders, as well as ceremonious hypocrites! Shall the ſervant of the Lord, then, keep ſilence, or debaſe his office by ſmooth and flattering addreſſes? No: "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear," he muſt "cry aloud and ſpare not," while he faithfully "ſhews them their tranſgreſſion." The event muſt be left to God.

What effect had our Lord's addreſs upon his proud and captious auditors? Their indignation was kindled, and yet they knew not how to vent it. They ſet upon him with fury, urging him to ſpeak on various ſubjects, only that they might bring an accuſation againſt him. But ſuch was his wiſdom, that their ſchemes could not prevail. Their caſe ſtands as an admonition

* Col. iii. 6.

to future ages; and from them we should be warned to beware of formality, and of opposition to Christ or his people. How terrible the condemnation of those, who are incensed by the very word, which should humble them! "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts *."

* Heb. iii. 7, 8.

SECT. 25.

Jesus warned his disciples of hypocrisy and cowardice—delivered the parable of the rich fool—gave cautions against worldliness—exhorted to prepare for his coming—foretold violent persecutions—preached the necessity of repentance, on the massacre of the Galileans—described the barren fig-tree—healed an infirm woman on the sabbath—shewed that many will be shut out of heaven—his message to Herod, and lamentation for Jerusalem.

THE conclusion of the preceding section represented our Lord in the midst of malicious enemies, at the house of a Pharisee, where he was invited to dine. During his continuance there, so great was the eagerness of the people without to hear his instructions, that an immense company, consisting of many thousands, assembled together, and even trampled on each other, from an earnest desire to be near him *. To gratify their wishes, therefore, he went out, and in the presence of them all, gave a solemn charge to his disciples, that they might not be misled or discouraged by the opponents, with whom he had been contending. He cautioned

* Luke xii. 1, &c.

them to beware of that diſſimulation, which he had juſt condemned in the Phariſees, and which would operate in them like leaven, imperceptibly ſpreading its influence around. It were eaſy to aſſume the garb of religion, and make high pretences to a peculiar ſanctity. But what would this avail? As it cannot impoſe upon God, ſo there is a day coming, when it ſhall be publiſhed to the whole world; for every ſecret thing ſhall be brought to light. Ah! how different from our preſent apprehenſion will many characters then appear! What diſhoneſty, treachery, and oppreſſion, what malice, and revenge, what lewdneſs, and intemperance, will be diſcovered, which are now concealed from human obſervation, and often cloked under a ſhew of piety! Who ſhall ſtand the teſt of that ſcrutiny? Thoſe, who now poſſeſs no more than a painted outſide, will then be the objects of contempt and abhorrence.

The diſciples had ſeen ſomething of the furious oppoſition of theſe inſidious adverſaries, which might have had a bad effect upon their minds, in deterring them from a bold profeſſion of the Goſpel. Jeſus, therefore, thus exhorted them to maintain a holy firmneſs in their adherence to his cauſe:—"You, my friends, muſt prepare to meet with cruel perſecution; but in my ſervice it will be diſhonourable for you to dread thoſe, who may reſiſt, however great and powerful they may be. You cannot ſuffer much or long from their rage. They may, poſſibly, be permitted to take away the life of your bodies; but their malicious efforts can extend no further. Let the Lord God Omnipotent be the ſole object of your fear. His influence

fluence reaches to the eternal world, and, if he be your enemy, he can render you miſerable both in your bodies and your ſouls for ever. Commit yourſelves to his care, and he will provide for your ſupport. He, who forgetteth not the ſparrows, worthleſs as they may ſeem, is conſtantly mindful of your minuteſt concerns: "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." But, whatever temporal advantages you may loſe for your attachment to me, I, your Lord and Maſter, whom you are not aſhamed to follow, will acknowledge, approve, and honour you before that glorious aſſemblage of Angels, who ſhall attend me in the day of my future appearance. Then, the perſons, who have declined an open profeſſion of my name, through cowardice or other worldly motives, ſhall meet with a different recompenſe: in a manner equally public they ſhall be diſowned and rejected, as baſe and deteſtable characters. They, indeed, who now oppoſe Me, may yet obtain forgiveneſs: I am the Son of man, who come in mercy, not in judgment. But the caſe of thoſe, who continue to deſpiſe the multiplied teſtimonies of the Holy Ghoſt, and blaſphemouſly aſcribe his operations to the influence of Satan, is remedileſs and deſperate, their ſin unpardonable. That divine Agent, whom they treat with impious ſcorn, will afford You his moſt gracious direction and ſupport in your ſevereſt trials. Depending on his aid, you may cheerfully face your perſecutors, when you are called to anſwer at their tribunals: He will inſpire you with wiſdom and courage, and furniſh you with words and arguments to plead my cauſe, ſo that you ſhall never be confounded before them."

Such were the Saviour's exhortations to his ancient diſciples; and ſurely of us alſo he requires the ſame ſteadfaſtneſs of faith, the ſame contempt of the rage and threatenings of men, the ſame unſhaken adherence to him and his ſervice. Have we any reaſon for dread, while the God of heaven is engaged to ſuſtain, protect, and comfort us, and a crown of glory is ſecured to us at the end of our warfare? Let thoſe tremble for the conſequences, who, in oppoſing Chriſt, undertake to "fight againſt God." However his patience may bear long with them, at laſt he will ariſe to execute judgment, when they ſhall be driven away, "as chaff before the wind," and overwhelmed with everlaſting horror and deſpair.

After this addreſs, Jeſus was deſired by one of the company, to perſuade his brother to agree to a fair diviſion of their paternal inheritance. This our Lord declined, as being a matter totally foreign to his character and office. His grand deſign was to draw men's attention to their ſpiritual concerns; and therefore he took occaſion from this diſpute between the brothers, to warn his hearers againſt covetouſneſs, one great cauſe of contentions in the world. He obſerved, that an eager ſolicitude to procure temporal poſſeſſions is abſurd, ſince the largeſt property will not prolong our lives, or render them truly comfortable.

He then ſhewed the fatal tendency of an immoderate attachment to preſent things, by a very ſtriking parable. A perſon is deſcribed, as receiving a vaſt augmentation of fortune by the fertility of his ground, and intent upon making the moſt of his ſubſtance.

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He propoſed to erect more capacious granaries, in which his increaſing ſtore might be ſecured, and flattered himſelf with the proſpect of affluence, eaſe, and ſenſual indulgence for many years. Having attained the ſummit of his wiſhes, he determined to retire from the hurry of buſineſs, and take all the enjoyments which his wealth could furniſh. Who would not have pronounced him a wiſe and happy man? But his ſchemes of pleaſure and earthly felicity were ſuddenly broken: and, in the midſt of his plans for the gratification of his animal nature, he was ſummoned away into the preſence of an angry God. He was condemned in the court of heaven for the moſt egregious folly, and his ſoul was required to enter upon a far different ſtate of exiſtence; while his boaſted poſſeſſions were conſigned to others, not being able to protract the execution of the ſentence for one moment. Alas! how common the character! Our Lord declared, that all thoſe are in a ſimilar ſituation, who are anxious to become opulent, and wiſh to ſpend their ſubſtance upon themſelves, without conſulting the will of God, or regarding the neceſſities of others; and who at the ſame time are at no pains to obtain the far more valuable riches of divine grace.

Jeſus proceeded to caution his diſciples againſt an inordinate attention to worldly circumſtances, as being inconſiſtent with the true ſpirit of the Goſpel, as implying a diſtruſt of God, and a comparative neglect of eternal things. On this occaſion he repeated ſome ſentiments, which he had before advanced in his ſermon upon the mount, while he ſpake to the following purpoſe.

poſe. "I charge it upon you, not to diſtract your minds with any ſecular cares, not even for the neceſſary proviſion of food or raiment. Will not He, who gave you life, ſupply you with the proper means of ſupporting it? The great God ſuſtains the ravens, without any contrivance on their parts: and will he forget you, who are ſo much more valuable in his ſight? Beſides, your utmoſt ſolicitude cannot effectually ſecure to you the leaſt advantage: it cannot add, in any degree, to your ſtature or your age. Look, alſo, upon the inanimate world, and obſerve God's minute attention to the very lilies, which, without their labour, he has decked with glorious ornaments, far ſurpaſſing the richeſt attire of the moſt exalted monarchs. Shall he, then, beſtow ſuch a profuſion of beauty upon the ſhort-lived flowers, and not furniſh you with ſuitable apparel? You are the objects of his choice and love, though you are ſo backward to truſt him. It is incongruous to your character, to be intent upon ſuch trifling concerns, and perplexed about your temporal ſupport. This, indeed, may be the caſe with thoſe, who know not God: but you ſhould leave the care of yourſelves with the God of heaven, who is your Father, and who, as he perceives, can readily beſtow, what is needful for you. Only be you vigorouſly preſſing towards his kingdom of glory; and, in addition to better, you ſhall poſſeſs thoſe earthly bleſſings, which ſhall be expedient for you. In the proſpect of that kingdom go forth with courage, feeble and defenceleſs as you may ſeem: for though you are a "little flock," your Father has decreed, and will rejoice, to fix you in that bliſsful inheritance, to which

He conducts you. This hope, surely, will render you comparatively indifferent about your worldly property, and dispose you to part with it, if God shall call you to the trial. This expectation will kindle a feeling regard for the poor. They demand a share in your wealth, and you will not refuse it. You will be chiefly solicitous to secure to yourselves those treasures, of which you cannot be deprived, and which will preserve their value and their lustre for evermore. These alone merit the affections of your hearts; and if indeed you have chosen them for your portion, your thoughts and desires will be directed to that, more than to any other object."

Such manner of persons were the primitive Christians required to be: and is it allowable for modern Christians to be engrossed with secular pursuits, or principally attentive to the supports and comforts of the animal life? No: it is still as necessary as ever for the disciples of Jesus to be "spiritually minded," and weaned from this present world. If, then, our happiness be placed upon any temporal possessions or carnal gratifications, we have not imbibed the spirit of the Gospel: and this very criterion, we fear, will prove that many among us have never felt the real influence of that religion, which is so generally professed. Let us beware for ourselves, and listen more carefully to our divine Teacher, whose continued exhortations call off our regard from all inferior concerns, that we may be waiting for our dismission from the body, and seeking a suitable preparation for eternity.

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Our Lord proceeded;—" You are ſtationed here only for a ſhort ſeaſon, and on a particular ſervice. You are, therefore, to be conſtantly expecting the return of your Lord, diligently attending to your proper work, with " your loins girded about," like men in readineſs for a journey or any vigorous exertions, and with " your lights burning," ſtanding in a proper poſture for the honourable reception of your Maſter. He may come ſuddenly; and, therefore, it is for you to be watching every moment, leſt you be confounded at the intimations of his approach. The faithful and the active ſervant, thus perſevering to the end, ſhall be glorioully diſtinguiſhed, when the Son of man appeareth."

Peter enquired whether the exhortation was deſigned for all, or for the Apoſtles in particular. Jeſus replied:—" Wherever the ſteward, of approved fidelity and prudence, ſhall be placed, if his Lord ſhall find him performing the duties of his office, and diſcharging his important truſt, he ſhall obtain peculiar notice, and be advanced to a ſtate of high dignity. But the careleſs and ſlothful ſervant, who, preſuming upon the delay of his Lord's return, ſhall abuſe the confidence repoſed in him, and proceed to acts of oppreſſion and intemperance, ſhall be awfully ſurpriſed in the midſt of his ſin and folly, and inſtantly deſtroyed without remedy. The man, who clearly underſtands and yet deſpiſes his Maſter's will, ſhall feel the greateſt ſeverity: for the degree of future puniſhment ſhall be proportioned to the advantages and opportunities enjoyed upon earth, according to that equitable maxim, " Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required."

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The admonition ſhould rouſe us to a ſerious enquiry, how we are acquitting ourſelves in our reſpective places. Are we properly fulfilling our truſt? If our Lord ſhould appear, could we meet him with joy, or expect a favourable reception from him? Are we waiting for his coming? On the contrary, are we not negligent and treacherous, endeavouring to put away from us the thought of death and judgment? One thing, however, we muſt allow; we have had clear information in our duty: repeated calls and exhortations have been addreſſed to our conſciences by religious books, by friends, and miniſters. Much, indeed, in various ways, has been committed to us; which, if we remain impenitent, will render our guilt more heinous and our condemnation more aggravated.

Many might be looking for temporal advantages from the ſervice of Jeſus; and therefore, to obviate their miſtake, he obſerved:—"The moſt violent contentions will prevail, in conſequence of my Goſpel; yet, afflictive as theſe may be, I cannot but earneſtly wiſh, that they were already begun. I have myſelf extreme agonies to endure; and, though I ſee the whole before me, I long to enter upon the conflict, and feel the moſt ardent deſires for the great event to be accompliſhed. Let my followers, therefore, be content to be oppoſed and hated; for my kingdom, though calculated to produce univerſal peace, will occaſion the moſt unnatural and furious conteſts, becauſe of the general prejudice and enmity againſt it. Many of thoſe, who are united by the ſtrongeſt ties of kindred, will now forget their obligations, and ſhew a violent averſion to

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ſuch, as claim their tendereſt regard. This muſt be aſcribed to the perverſeneſs of men, who reject my doctrine in contempt of the cleareſt evidences. They are attentive enough to the common concerns of life, and diſcover much ingenuity in judging of the wind and the weather: but ah! how ſtupidly unmindful of the ſurpriſing teſtimonies, which God has given of his Son! Might not reaſon itſelf have led them to a more conſiſtent determination? Is there any one liable to be convicted of an offence, for which he may ſuffer the ſevereſt penalties of the law, who will not be diſpoſed to ſeek reconciliation with his adverſary, while any favourable terms can be obtained? Give diligence, then, to procure forgiveneſs with your offended God, before he proceed againſt you and ſummon you to judgment, when nothing but rigorous juſtice can be looked for, and the everlaſting puniſhment, due to your iniquities, will be inflicted."

Let us ſeriouſly attend to theſe declarations of our Redeemer. The effects, which he foretold, have taken place: furious and bloody perſecutions have been raiſed againſt his faithful diſciples; and, even to this day, theſe perſons are generally oppoſed and hated by ſome of their neareſt relatives. Let us not, however, be intimidated by the proſpect of any difficulties in his ſervice; but, while we contemplate his courage and zeal in meeting death itſelf for our ſakes, let us cheerfully follow. We blame the ſtupidity of the Jews in their obſtinate rejection of the Meſſiah; but do We diſcern the character, and unfeignedly ſubmit to the authority, of Jeſus? O let us gladly accept his mediation, that we may not come under

der the wrath of Almighty God, as we have deserved, nor be cast into that prison, from which there can be no deliverance!

Some of our Lord's audience acquainted him with the terrible slaughter of certain seditious Galileans, whom Pilate had put to death, even while they were offering their sacrifices *. But, without passing any judgment on their case, he endeavoured to turn the attention of the people to their own perilous situation, representing them all as equally in a state of ruin, and exposed not merely to temporal calamities but to eternal perdition, without an entire change and renovation. Those, who are destroyed suddenly and by any singular affliction (as the Galileans, and others who had been killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam), are often considered as offenders of the most atrocious kind, marked out by the visitation of an angry God, as monuments of his peculiar vengeance. Jesus, however, has here taught us, not to decide against them in so rash a manner, or to set ourselves above them, but seriously to remember our own danger and the absolute necessity of our conversion. He solemnly declared, twice together, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Is this awful assertion sufficiently regarded? Do not many draw the most uncharitable conclusions against others, and presumptuously flatter themselves on their supposed comparative excellence? It is allowed, that persons of a very profligate character have incurred the divine displeasure and must be reformed: but those, who have been regular in their conduct, cannot bear to

* Luke xiii. 1, &c.

be

be ranked upon a level with them, or believe that there is any need of deep contrition for themſelves. This is indeed a fatal delusion: ſince all inherit a natural depravity, all muſt be renewed and ſanctified; to thoſe, who are not, ſalvation is impoſſible.

To impreſs them with a ſenſe of their danger, Jeſus delivered a parable. A fig-tree, planted in a well cultivated ſoil, diſappointed the owner's wiſhes for three ſucceſſive years. As it produced nothing, it cumbered the ground. Its foliage, unaccompanied with fruit, was no compenſation for the pains and expenſe of the proprietor, who therefore directed it to be cut down. The ſervant to whom the care of the trees was committed, requeſted that it might be ſpared one year longer, till further expedients were tried; and then it was agreed, that, if it ſtill continued barren, it ſhould be deſtroyed as utterly hopeleſs. The inſtructions, hereby conveyed, are obvious. It is, ſurely, a reaſonable injunction, that thoſe who are placed in the Church, under the culture of religious means and ordinances, ſhould bring forth fruit unto God. But ah! how many, even in ſuch a favoured ſituation, remain unprofitable, and therefore muſt neceſſarily be diſpleaſing to God! Through the interceſſion of his Son, or the prayers of his miniſters, he may graciouſly delay his threatened vengeance; but the time of his patience is limited, and, if repeated warnings produce no good effect upon them, the ſtroke of juſtice muſt fall: they ſhall feel the weight of his indignation.

As Jeſus travelled through Galilee, he attended the public worſhip of the Synagogues on the ſabbath.

In one of these assemblies, a poor unhappy woman, who had been bowed together by infirmity for eighteen years, excited his compassion; and instantly, without any solicitation, he restored her to health and vigour. Such a miraculous display of power and benevolence should have drawn forth praises from every tongue. But the ruler of the Synagogue objected to it with indignation, as if it had been a profanation of the sacred day. Jesus, however, convicted him of the grossest hypocrisy in his pretended zeal for God, and defended his own conduct in relieving this afflicted creature, from the attention which they all paid to their very cattle on the sabbath. Acts of mercy, we observe, as well as those of necessity, are not prohibited as an infringement of the holy rest. His enemies, therefore, were ashamed of their opposition; and the common people were the more attached to him for his wonderful operations. On that occasion he repeated the parable of the grain of mustard-seed, and that also of the leaven, in both which he represented the gradual and extensive enlargement of his spiritual kingdom, notwithstanding the resistance it should meet with. The hatred and violence of men shall not frustrate the counsel of God. His Gospel shall spread; and its blessed influence shall be felt and acknowledged, through all the nations of the earth.

Our Lord proceeded from one city and village to another, directing his course to Jerusalem. In every place he scattered the good seed of divine truth, diligently improving the short time, which now remained for him in the world. Upon the road, as it should

 seem,

ſeem, a queſtion was put to him by one of the company, "Lord, are there few that be ſaved?" The enquiry was probably made through vain curioſity, which Jeſus never gratified: and therefore, inſtead of giving a direct anſwer, he thus addreſſed himſelf to the conſciences of the people, exhorting them to be earneſtly ſolicitous for their own ſalvation, rather than to indulge any ſubtle ſpeculations about that of others:

"The path to heaven lies through a ſtrait gate, which is difficult of acceſs, and your entrance may be reſiſted by numerous enemies. Be not, however, diſcouraged; but contend for admiſſion in the moſt reſolute manner, and break through every obſtruction. Many, who are totally indifferent about eternal life, or refuſe to go in the only appointed way, will ſhortly find, that the door is finally and for ever barred againſt them. It will then be too late to implore the divine mercy. Though they cry ever ſo importunately, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," the great Maſter of the houſhold will reply, "I know you not." He will not admit the plea of their former high privileges or honourable ſituation in the Church: but diſſemblers, formaliſts, and all who die in impenitence, ſhall be covered with terrible confuſion, while the Judge ſhall diſown their boaſted relation to Him, and ſhall pronounce with awful majeſty, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." Inconceivable anguiſh, remorſe, and deſpair, ſhall overwhelm many of thoſe, who gloried in their near connection with the moſt eminent ſaints of God, when they ſhall ſee themſelves for ever ſeparated from their ſociety. The unbelieving Jews ſhall behold the de-

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ſpiſed Gentiles, from the remoteſt corners of the earth, enter into glory, while they ſhall be eternally thruſt out. Great numbers of thoſe, who may now be thought the fartheſt from God, ſhall attain a ſtate of peculiar exaltation in my kingdom; and not a few, who are here diſtinguiſhed above others by their religious advantages, ſhall then be marked out, for their contemptuous abuſe of them, by the ſevereſt vengeance."

Does not the ſolemn admonition excite an alarm in us, who are placed in the Chriſtian Church, and favoured with an evangelical miniſtry? Let us not preſume upon our external privileges, but conſider, how much is to be done. Let us be rouſed from our ſtupor; for "it is high time to awake out of ſleep." If we be diſtreſſed by the fear of finding the door barred againſt us, let us now look unto Jeſus, and cry, with all the ſtrength and vigour of our ſouls, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," and our application will infallibly ſucceed.

On the ſame day, on which our Lord had delivered the exhortations laſt mentioned, intelligence was brought, that Herod, the governor of the country, was determined to deſtroy him. This was ſaid, with an intention of intimidating him from proſecuting his labours in thoſe parts. But Jeſus could not be terrified; and therefore he replied, by a meſſage to the crafty and perſecuting prince, that, in ſpite of all his ſchemes, he would proceed with his work, performing the moſt miraculous and benevolent operations, a little longer; that very ſhortly he ſhould finiſh his courſe; and yet, that he ſhould lay down his life, not in Galilee, where

he then was, but in Jerufalem, the grand feat of perfecution. The example teaches us not to be difmayed, whoever may threaten or oppofe us, in the proper execution of our office. Let us faithfully attend to our refpective duties, and perfevere in them, though furrounded by dangers. We fhall walk but a few days more; and the God, whom we ferve, will protect us, till the end of our prefent appointment be anfwered. O that we may clofe our labours honourably, and then, like our Lord, " be perfected!"

After obferving that he muft perifh in Jerufalem, he was led to reflect upon the heinous guilt, and approaching defolation, of that murderous city, and broke forth into the moft tender and affecting lamentation over it. Jerufalem was the city, where the blood of many prophets and holy men had been fhed; the city, which had fcornfully rejected the gracious offers of the Saviour, repaid his fervices of love with cruelty, and even then meditated his deftruction: yet, abandoned as it was, Jefus expreffed the deepeft forrow for its miferable ftate. He declared, that God, in righteous judgment, was about to lay wafte the place with the moft awful calamities, till the wretched inhabitants fhould learn to value and long for their promifed Meffiah, though they defpifed Him, who fuftained that character.

What forbearance, kindnefs, and compaffion, do we difcover in the character of our Redeemer! Still he poffeffes the fame bowels of mercy. Long time does he ftrive with finners, ufing one expedient after another to promote their falvation. According to his own

defcription,

deſcription, he ſtill propoſes to gather them as a hen gathers her helpleſs brood under her wings, to protect and nouriſh, and to afford them ſecurity and comfort in himſelf. But alas! how many proudly ſpurn at the offer! And what can be expected to follow from their baſe conduct, but final and remedileſs perdition? Yet even then, he abandons them, as it ſhould ſeem, with difficulty, charging their deſtruction upon themſelves: "I would,—and ye would not *." May we learn wiſdom from the wretched infatuation of thoſe, who have periſhed in their unbelief! May we all, therefore, with one heart and voice, welcome the Saviour, who brings with him pardon, peace, and eternal life! Let us take up our words now, with unfeigned faith, and we ſhall ſpeak them with confidence and joy at the laſt day, "Bleſſed is he, that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Amen.

* See alſo Hoſ. xi. 8.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 26.

Jesus dined with a Pharisee on the sabbath—healed a dropsy—inculcated humility and a regard to the poor—delivered the parable of the great supper—warned his followers to prepare for suffering—vindicated his attention to sinners by the parables of the lost sheep—the piece of silver—and the prodigal son.

If our review of the life of Jesus affect us, as it ought, it will not only produce in us an admiration of his excellency, who is "fairer than the children of men," but regulate our conduct and sanctify our dispositions. While we "behold the glory of the Lord," we shall be "changed into the same image *." Let us pray continually, that we may feel this influence from his example; so shall we be followers of the Lord, "not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth."

Jesus was travelling through Galilee towards Jerusalem; and, probably in that journey, a principal Pharisee, a man of rank, invited him to dinner †. It might seem an act of condescension in a person of emi-

* 2 Cor. iii. 18. † Luke xiv. 1, &c.

nence,

nence, to aſk or admit ſuch a gueſt into his houſe, as appeared to be greatly his inferior. But a favour was conferred on the Phariſee, rather than on Jeſus. The moſt exalted monarch might have ſaid with reaſon, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou ſhouldſt come under my roof." It was an inſtance of "the meekneſs and gentleneſs of Chriſt," that he vouchſafed to converſe freely with ſinful creatures, and diſcovered no diſtance in his behaviour. He readily gave his company to thoſe, who deſired it; not indeed for his own pleaſure, or the convenience of eating with them, but for their benefit. He "ſought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be ſaved."

As this occurred on the ſabbath, we infer, that religion does not require us to refuſe all intercourſe with others throughout that day. There may be proper occaſions for friendly viſits in ſome parts of it; but we ſhould be careful, to maintain a ſpirit and converſation, ſuitable to its grand deſign. The example of Jeſus cannot be adduced in vindication of that vanity and diſſipation, by which it is ſo generally perverted and profaned.

It ſhould ſeem, that many perſons were aſſembled at the Phariſee's houſe, and ſuch as were not well affected to Jeſus; for "they watched him." Perhaps the invitation was given, not from kindneſs, but malevolence, on purpoſe to paſs the moſt invidious cenſures upon him. How odious the diſpoſition of thoſe, who are eagle-eyed in ſcrutinizing the conduct of others, and who rejoice to find any real objections againſt them! And yet you, who are the faithful diſciples of Jeſus,

 are

are frequently placed in the midſt of ſuch malignant obſervers. Their attention is fixed upon you, with a view, not to commend what is laudable, but to diſcover and expoſe your faults, that ſo they may reproach that holy name, by which you are called. You, therefore, ſhould be vigilant as well as they; that their wiſhes may be defeated, and themſelves aſhamed, when they ſhall ſee the wiſdom and conſiſtency of your deportment.

A perſon, who was preſent, afflicted with the dropſy, excited the compaſſionate regard of Jeſus. He, however, knowing that the lawyers and Phariſees before him were ſeeking for an accuſation againſt him, appealed to them, whether it would be any violation of the ſabbath to perform a cure on that day. They were unable to reply; while he, unmindful of their cenſures, inſtantly reſtored the diſeaſed man to perfect health, obſerving, that, however they might object to this act of mercy, they would none of them ſcruple to relieve their very cattle in diſtreſs. They felt the force of his words, and were confounded. Thus likewiſe, it frequently happens, that the enemies of religion are ſuddenly reſtrained and abaſhed, by a ſerious remark or a ſolemn addreſs to their conſciences. Let us not, therefore, be deterred by their inſidious deſigns, but perſevere in the path of duty.

Jeſus not only juſtified himſelf, but reproved them for their pride and love of precedency. He took notice, that they were all ambitious of the higheſt ſeats at the table, and argued that ſuch a contention for places of honour was extremely diſguſting, and that it would

be much more becoming to give way to others. He ſhewed, that an arrogant ſpirit is odious, and, while it claims reſpect, incurs contempt; and, on the contrary, that a modeſt and humble deportment, which ſeems to ſhun obſervation, invariably conciliates eſteem. This is the caſe in the common intercourſe of men; and it holds true, if we apply it to our temper and conduct towards God. "He reſiſteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble *." Who will not allow, that it is incumbent upon us, in his preſence, "to take the loweſt room?" Yet how little are the Apoſtolic injunctions regarded or underſtood, "In lowlineſs of mind, let each eſteem other better than themſelves:" "in honour preferring one another †!"

Jeſus continued to deliver the moſt ſerious inſtructions and admonitions to the company before him. With a reference, no doubt, to their general ſpirit and practice, while he addreſſed himſelf to the perſon who had invited him, he condemned the cuſtom of providing ſumptuous and coſtly entertainments merely for their relations and opulent neighbours, and recommended an attention to the relief and comfort of the afflicted, in all their various diſtreſſes. How much extravagance prevails in ſupporting magnificent tables for the reception of thoſe, who want nothing! The large ſums, which are thus expended, ſerve only to feed our own pride and ſenſuality. But what a ſordid parſimony is ſhewn in contributing to the ſupport of the truly neceſſitous, who can make no returns! Thoſe, however, are bleſſed, who, from faith and love un-

* 1 Pet. v. 5.

† Phil. ii. 3. Rom. xii. 10.

feigned, "deal their bread to the hungry, and bring the poor, that are cast out, to their houses *." The Lord of heaven will consider himself as their debtor, and will render them an abundant recompense in the great day of retribution.

The solemn discourse of Jesus, probably, left a good impression on the audience. One of the company, at least, expressed his approbation and desire of continuing the subject, by remarking the exceeding felicity of those, who shall be admitted to the sacred feast, which God has provided in his kingdom. Possibly, he might not understand or really wish for the happiness, of which he spake: however, in order to excite both him and all present to a serious examination of their state, Jesus shewed, that the most gracious offers of it are made to mankind, and rejected with contempt by the greater part.

He represented, in a most interesting and affecting parable, a large and rich supper prepared for the accommodation of many guests. The Lord God, by the Gospel of his Son, has furnished the grand entertainment here implied, in which every thing is set before us, that can give delight or vigour to the soul. How valuable and exquisite are the blessings, of which it consists! They are such as these: pardon, peace, holiness, and fellowship with God even upon earth; divine light, strength, and consolation, communicated to the soul; an infallible promise of an admission into heaven, and a present foretaste of its joys. Who does not ardently desire to partake of the sumptuous banquet?

* Isa. lviii. 7.

quet? It is a royal feaſt; and no want of proviſions need be apprehended, for there is a bountiful and inexhauſtible ſupply.

Many gueſts are invited, and an urgent meſſage is ſen, preſſing their immediate attendance, ſince the neceſſary preparations for their reception are now completed. Thus the call of mercy is given, by the publication of the Goſpel, to an innumerable company, who are earneſtly exhorted not to neglect the gracious offer. It was firſt, and in a particular manner, addreſſed to the Jews; but the language is the ſame to all who hear it, from one age to another, "Come, for all things are now ready." Every thing is done on God's part, which is proper and requiſite for the ſecuring of eternal ſalvation to our guilty race. But their conſent is indiſpenſable: and is it poſſible that this can be refuſed?

Thoſe, who are bidden, are unwilling, on various pretences, to accept the kind invitation. Different excuſes for their abſence are framed; all weak and ridiculous. It is alleged, that they have other engagements; and yet theſe are ſuch, as, though not wrong in themſelves, are trifling, or may be deferred, and need not prevent their attendance. Their very pleas, therefore, ſhew a marked contempt of the entertainment. Thus, alas! the propoſals of the Goſpel are rejected with ſcorn. Men pretend, indeed, to apologize for their conduct. Secular cares and occupations, or domeſtic comforts, ſo totally engroſs them, that it is ſuppoſed impoſſible and unneceſſary for them to pay any regard to their ſpiritual concerns. Such reaſons, ſurely,

ſurely, cannot be admitted in their vindication; nay rather, they will condemn them, as proving their hearts to be alienated from God. Their employments may not be ſinful, but highly proper, if purſued on right principles, and in due ſubordination to the care of their ſouls. Yet, probably, more perſons periſh eternally through an immoderate and unſeaſonable attention to things, which are right in themſelves, than by groſs and avowed iniquity.

After the refuſal of thoſe, who were firſt bidden, the invitation is enlarged. The ſervant is charged to bring in the poor and diſabled; and, as ſufficient room ſtill remains for the accommodation of many more gueſts, he is diſpatched in ſearch of thoſe, who are diſperſed abroad in the moſt forlorn and wretched condition. Even theſe, the refuſe of men, are importuned, by the moſt cogent arguments, to enter, and ſatisfy their wants; that ſo the ſumptuous preparations may not be loſt. The Jewiſh nation deſpiſed their own mercies; but "through their fall ſalvation is come unto the Gentiles *." To us, who are "the ends of the earth," is the gracious call addreſſed. Though we are in a ſpiritual ſenſe, "poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind," we are allowed to partake of the rich banquet. Nay, though we be ſinners of the moſt abandoned character, fitly repreſented by thoſe who lie in "the highways and hedges," we are permitted, and even preſſed in the moſt forcible manner, to come. Many have already complied with the invitation; but "yet there is room"

* Rom. xi. 11.

for

for thousands more; and it is the Lord's determination, that his house shall be filled.

The Master is incensed, when his kindness is rejected, and he resolves in displeasure, that those, who have shewn such contempt of him, shall be excluded from his entertainment. This is an awful admonition indeed. The Lord of heaven and earth considers himself as insulted, when his Gospel is made light of. Do we not dread his indignation? Why, then, do we trifle with his messages of mercy? Possibly, they may never be renewed. He may instantly bar the door against us, and declare, "Those men shall not taste of my supper." Since he has done this against the Jews, let us fear for ourselves, "lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief *."

Great multitudes still attended Jesus in his progress; and yet, probably, but few of them were attached to his cause, from right principles. It is to be expected, that, amongst the numerous professors of the Gospel, there will be many of a suspicious character. All, therefore, should be exhorted to examine of what sort their religion is, from what motives it was first taken up, and whether they so value it, as to be willing to suffer for its sake. To this purpose our Lord addressed the vast concourse of people, who followed him:

"If any man would enter into my service, he must renounce all worldly views and expectations. Whosoever consents not, on every necessary occasion, to go in opposition to his nearest friends and relatives, so as to appear even to hate them; whosoever is averse to

* Heb. iv. 11.

give

give up the moſt beloved enjoyments, and lay down life itſelf, in my cauſe, cannot be acknowledged as my diſciple. Severe as the trial may ſeem, if he refuſe to combat difficulties, to endure extreme hardſhips, and to perſiſt in the path, which my example or command may point out, he poſſeſſes not the temper of mind indiſpenſably requiſite for my ſervants."

"You, therefore, who profeſs an attachment to me, ſhould deliberate well what you do; for you are undertaking an arduous and important buſineſs. Like one, who is about to raiſe an edifice, you ſhould make the proper calculations, that you may know, whether you can finiſh the work which you are planning. The inconſiderate builder, whoſe labours are diſappointed and ſuſpended, is deſervedly expoſed to the deriſion of others. Or, as a prince, who meditates an hoſtile expedition againſt a neighbouring power, you ſhould enquire, if you are ſufficiently prepared to meet your enemy. Is your force ſuch, as to give you a reaſonable hope of ſucceſs? It were better, not to provoke an attack, than haſtily to ruſh into the battle, and there to betray your weakneſs and cowardice. Rather than fall in the conflict, or baſely deſert your ſtandard, remain in your preſent ſtate, bad as it may be, and prefer a diſhonourable peace to a deſtructive war."

"Thus you ſhould examine, whether you poſſeſs what my ſervice demands: for, if you be unwilling to renounce the deareſt objects in life, for my ſake, you cannot be ranked amongſt my people, or receive any advantage at my hands. With an unſound profeſſion of religion, you would reſemble the "ſalt, which has loſt

loſt its ſavour," and then, inſtead of anſwering any valuable purpoſe, as thoſe who are "the ſalt of the earth," you would be uſeleſs, or a nuiſance in your place, fit only to be caſt out with contempt. Let every one, who deſires inſtruction, attend to the ſolemn admonition."

Such was our Lord's addreſs to his followers; and, in its main argument, it is perfectly applicable to ourſelves. The ſame bold and diſintereſted regard to him, which he then required, we alſo muſt poſſeſs. With the ſame holy jealouſy and circumſpection, we ſhould ſearch and try our hearts. Are we his diſciples indeed? What motives or expectations induced us to aſſume that character? Or, what is our preſent plan? Are we determined to give up every thing, which ſtands in competition with Chriſt, that he may be our "all in all?" If otherwiſe, let us not act as diſſemblers with God, leſt we be rejected with abhorrence, as far more deteſtable than thoſe, who never made pretenſions to ſanctity.

The foregoing exhortation may ſeem harſh and ſevere, to perſons of a tender ſpirit; and thoſe who are oppreſſed with guilt, may be ready to infer, that Jeſus forbids, rather than encourages, their application. But the following repreſentation will obviate ſuch a concluſion.

Many publicans and ſinners came about him, ſhewing great eagerneſs in liſtening to his inſtructions *. Nor did he diſdain their company, or drive them from him by denunciations of vengeance, as if their caſe were

* Luke xv. 1, &c.

deſperate.

desperate. His condescending attentions and compassionate addresses, were calculated to inspire them with humble hope towards God. These, however, displeased the Scribes and Pharisees; and they insinuated, that he countenanced the profane and licentious. A similar objection is often urged against his ministers, when those, who have been dissolute and abandoned, are drawn to hear them. It is thought a reproach to the Gospel, that it gives the most gracious invitations, and proposes a full and free forgiveness, to men of this description. But this is, in fact, its brightest glory, though too dazzling for carnal eyes to behold; and, accordingly, they turn away from it with disgust. Those especially, who expect and claim a preference for their own supposed goodness, quarrel with the greatness of the mercy, and generally pretend a vast concern for the interests of morality, which, they rashly conclude, are likely to sustain an injury. In opposition to them, we believe it to be for the honour of Christ, that " he receiveth sinners," even those, who are marked out as peculiarly infamous for their numerous and aggravated offences. He welcomes, pardons, sanctifies, comforts, protects, and saves them. This is extensive, rich, and distinguishing grace indeed, and it should induce us more than ever, to love, and praise, and trust him. He acts in a way worthy of himself: and those, who know his character, admire that very part of it, which enrages the Pharisees.

He vindicated his own conduct, shewing its propriety, and the extreme unreasonableness of the objections urged. This he did in three parables, all tending

ing to illuſtrate the abundance and the freeneſs of his mercy, and each an emblem of the favourable reception, which penitent ſinners, though they have been accounted moſt hopeleſs, ſhall meet with from him. Let the tranſgreſſor, then, who is ready to ſink into deſpair, be encouraged to lift up his eyes to this dear Lord and Saviour, who will not diſdain to help him.

A ſtriking appeal is made to our own feelings, and the general practice of mankind. Where is the perſon, who, loſing only one out of a numerous flock of ſheep, will not be at pains to ſearch after it, and expreſs a peculiar pleaſure in its recovery, eſpecially if it had appeared unlikely to be found? Our own miſerable ſtate is here exhibited. We have wandered far from the fold of God, and, though expoſed to want and the aſſaults of furious and malicious enemies, are unwilling of ourſelves to return. But our attention is directed to the compaſſionate care of Jeſus, under the character of "the good Shepherd," who, with much labour to himſelf, ſeeks and reſcues the loſt ſheep, and takes it under his immediate protection. Nor ſhould this be conſidered as a trifling incident, a matter of indifference. Every inſtance of the converſion of a ſinner is an important event, and will communicate the higheſt delight to thoſe, who underſtand the worth of an immortal ſoul. Jeſus himſelf exults, and all the bleſſed inhabitants of heaven expreſs a rapturous joy, as if their own happineſs were increaſed, when any, however profligate, is "turned from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." They triumph in ſuch a reſtoration, as being a peculiar acquiſition, more than

in the continued felicity of eſtabliſhed believers, whom they looked upon as already ſecure. This is a grand diſplay of pure and diſintereſted benevolence in the celeſtial world: who ſhall object, or be tortured at the ſight, but the malignant prince of darkneſs, and they who bear his image?

Another repreſentation, to the ſame purpoſe, is given us in the caſe of a poor woman, who, after much anxiety and diligent ſearch, finds the piece of money, which ſhe had loſt out of her little treaſure. This appears a prize peculiarly valuable, and yields her more ſatisfaction than all her other ſtock, which ſhe conſidered as a ſafe poſſeſſion. Such is the generous concern, which Jeſus feels for the periſhing ſouls of ſinners. In whatever inſtances his grace proves effectual, ſo that they, "who ſometimes were far off, are made nigh" to God, he rejoices that he has done and ſuffered ſo much for their ſalvation, and the holy Angels, who are called to witneſs the momentous change, are filled with wonder, love, and praiſe. And ſhall we preſume to cenſure him for this exalted kindneſs? Rather, ſhall we not take occaſion from it, to admire the Shepherd, who came in ſearch of us, and adore the ever-bleſſed Lord of all, who ſpared no pains for our recovery?

The ſubject is ſtill further illuſtrated in another parable. A ſtory is related, containing circumſtances to which no hearer can refuſe to liſten: and the ſimplicity of the narrative is ſuch, as not only engages the attention, but intereſts and affects the heart.—The younger of two ſons, after receiving his proportion of fortune, is repreſented as departing from his father's houſe, the reſtraints

restraints of which were irksome to him, and going to a distant country. There the thoughtless youth squandered away his substance by intemperance. He was soon reduced to the most infamous servitude, and to such a degree of wretchedness, that he was on the point of perishing by hunger. A lively emblem of our sinful conduct and its miserable consequences! A particular reference to the Gentile world, and to the case of profligate characters, might be designed. But we have all resembled this foolish man, in disliking the strictness of true religion, casting off the fear of God, and departing from him, with a full determination to gratify the desires of our hearts. But have we found the happiness, which we expected in our own ways? Alas! far otherwise. The effects of our apostasy have been distressing and ruinous in the extreme. Like the poor prodigal, we are become destitute, enslaved, and contemptible. In such a state, we can procure nothing to support and satisfy the soul, and we stand on the brink of destruction. How pitiable the case! And it is the more pitiable, as few are sensible of their degradation and wretchedness.

A change, however, took place in the unhappy youth. "He came to himself," as if he had been till that time intoxicated or insane; and then reflecting on the comfortable situation he had left in his father's family, and the misery, disgrace, and danger, which he had brought upon himself, he formed the resolution of returning to his insulted parent. He remembered his former pride, rebellion, and wickedness; and his purpose was to confess his aggravated guilt, and earnestly

to requeſt the ſhelter of his father's roof, though it ſhould be in the loweſt capacity of a menial ſervant. He proceeded, without delay, to execute his plan. In this ſtage of the hiſtory we perceive the pleaſing character of a true penitent. Then only, does a man "come to himſelf," or enjoy the proper exerciſe of his reaſon, when he feels convictions of his folly and baſeneſs, and diſcovers ſtrong deſires of reſtoration to the divine favour. And what other expedient can the awakened ſinner adopt, but to flee to his offended God, to pour out his ſoul with unfeigned contrition, and to lift up his voice to heaven with inceſſant cries for mercy? Though he dare not be confident of acceptance, it will be proper, ſurely, to try the effect of an humble application: and, if he cannot aſk for the privileges of a child, let him earneſtly ſolicit an admiſſion into the family on any terms. But his former practices, principles, and connexions, muſt be renounced, and a return not only reſolved on, but inſtantly attempted.

The kind and forgiving father beheld the ſon at a diſtance; and, as if he had forgotten his paſt ingratitude and perverſeneſs, without waiting for his nearer approach, he ran with open arms to embrace him. The penitent youth began his intended confeſſion; but the indulgent parent, as if impatient to relieve his diſtreſs, interrupted him, prevented his requeſt, aſſured him of his love by the ſtrongeſt tokens, and immediately commanded all his houſhold to give the moſt expreſſive demonſtrations of their joy, inaſmuch as his dear child, who had been conſidered as irretrievably loſt, was reſtored to life and happineſs. What does all this

this teach us, but that God can pardon more freely and extensively, than we could have conceived? He views with delight the very beginnings of repentance, the first efforts of a sinner towards a return. He listens with satisfaction to his broken cries for mercy, and, instead of upbraiding him with any part of his accumulated guilt, he hastens to confer every mark of affectionate regard. The Angels of heaven, also, as well as believers upon earth, are required to exult in that event, from which the most glorious effects are produced. Such is the loving kindness of our God! Who, then, shall despair of acceptance or hesitate to apply unto him? "He will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy: he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing *."

But one of the family refuses to participate in the general happiness. The elder son is disgusted at the attention shewn to his brother, who had been so licentious and abandoned, and, while he boasts of his own dutiful subjection to his father, complains that he meets not with such a preference, as he might have expected. The father condescends to argue with him on the unreasonableness of his objections, even allowing the justice of his claims, and still maintains that it was every way proper and expedient to express the highest delight in the recovery of a child, who had been given up as lost. This part of the parable contains a striking reproof of those proud and captious adversaries, the Scribes and Pharisees, who reproached the Saviour for receiving sinners. Here their own perverseness is ex-

* Zeph. iii. 17.

hibited. For, while they were incenſed, that any notice ſhould be taken of the moſt diſſolute characters, or at leaſt that they ſhould be admitted to favour upon the ſame terms with themſelves; and, while the Jewiſh nation in general could not bear, " that the Gentiles ſhould be fellow-heirs, and of the ſame body," they moſt exactly reſembled the elder brother. And do not many, in modern times, betray a ſimilar averſion to the rich grace of the Goſpel, which is extended to the moſt heinous offenders? There are thoſe, who value themſelves on the uninterrupted regularity of their conduct, and are extremely diſguſted, that no peculiar compliment is paid to their excellence, and that others are put upon a level with them. But are they not wrong, even on their own principles? For, granting all that they can poſſibly urge in their behalf, no injury will be done to them by the kind and affectionate manner, in which every penitent is received. Let them make good their claim, and they will be treated with ſuitable reſpect. But let them not refuſe to rejoice, when thoſe, whoſe caſes appeared moſt hopeleſs, are taken into the number of the children of God and heirs of everlaſting life. The Lord God will vindicate his own glory in diſpenſing his mercy freely. Let us not petulantly object to any part of his plan of redemption, but drop all our angry prejudices againſt it. Let us implore forgiveneſs for ourſelves, as thoſe who deſerve to periſh; and, under ſuch a conviction, we ſhall wonder, not that others are ſaved, but that we, who " were enemies, are reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

JESUS

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 27.

Jesus delivered the parable of the unjust steward—shewed the use of money—reproved the Pharisees—described the case of the rich man and Lazarus—exhorted to avoid giving offence, to forgive injuries, and maintain faith—cured ten lepers—foretold the destruction of Jerusalem—described the nature of acceptable prayer, by the parable of the importunate widow, and that of the Pharisee and Publican.

JESUS directed his steps towards Jerusalem, with a full view of all his sufferings before him, and even with an earnest desire to enter upon them. He was yet in Galilee; and, during his progress through that country, he continued to exercise his ministry, labouring to diffuse the knowledge of the truth, and to give unequivocal proofs of his divine character. While we contemplate him persisting in his work with diligence and cheerfulness to the very last, may we learn to persevere in the most vigorous exertions for the glory of his name, till we finish our course! What, though the cross lies before us? Let us imitate the holy example of the Saviour; and we shall follow him to his kingdom.

Publicans and ſinners, we have ſeen, attended on his preaching, and many Scribes and Phariſees, alſo, were preſent at the ſame time. In the audience of them all, and with a view to their inſtruction, he addreſſed his diſciples, pointing out in what manner worldly poſſeſſions are to be improved *. He ſpake, as uſual, in parabolical language, and repreſented a rich man calling his ſteward to account, that he might diſmiſs him for unfaithfulneſs in his truſt. The guilty ſervant attempted not his own vindication, but ſhewed extreme ſolicitude about his future ſupport. He contrived to make friends to himſelf by falſifying his books in favour of the various debtors of his lord, that ſo they might be diſpoſed to entertain and aſſiſt him, when diſcarded from his office. The expedient was diſhonourable and baſe, but it was ingenious; and, therefore, his maſter, who could not but condemn the injuſtice, admired the prudence of the man, who had ſo artfully provided for his own ſubſiſtence. We are here taught to conſider ourſelves as the ſtewards of God, who is the great Lord and Proprietor of all. At no diſtant period we muſt give up our accounts, and be removed from our preſent poſt. What, then, ſhall we do? Have we not been negligent and treacherous in the diſcharge of our truſt? Have we not waſted our Maſter's goods, devoting that to the purpoſes of pride and ſenſuality, which God claims for his own? How ſhall we anſwer to the accuſation? Have we no fears about our future condition? Or, what ſchemes have we formed, for our own ſecurity in the day of our calamity?

* Luke xvi. 1, &c.

Jeſus

Jeſus obſerved, at the cloſe of the parable, that they, whoſe hearts are fixed upon this world, are much more attentive to their ſecular intereſts, than thoſe are to their ſpiritual and eternal concerns, whom God hath taught to know their duty and happineſs. Surely, there is abundant cauſe to reprove the remiſſneſs of Chriſtians among ourſelves; for we perceive in them but little of that contrivance and aſſiduity for the welfare of their ſouls, which men in general diſcover for the attainment of the low and trifling objects of the preſent life.

Jeſus, alſo, improved and applied the parable, to the following effect. "Riches, which commonly deceive the expectations of their poſſeſſors, and often are ſubſervient to the purpoſes of ſin, may yet be employed to great advantage. By a proper uſe of them, you may conciliate the eſteem of thoſe, whoſe friendſhip is moſt valuable. Many, whom you have inſtructed, relieved, viſited, and cheered, and to whom your bounty has endeared you, may go before you to heaven, and, upon your removal from the place you now fill up, may ſtand ready to welcome you to the ſame bliſsful habitations, where they will confeſs their obligations to you. A very ſmall ſhare, indeed, of wealth may be committed to your care; but your religious principles will be evinced by your behaviour in the loweſt ſtation, ſo that we may ſafely infer from it, what would be your conduct in a higher. If you act as unfaithful ſtewards in the diſpoſal of your temporal ſubſtance, worthleſs as it is, how can you expect to be intruſted with thoſe bleſſings, which are of real value? And if you treacherouſly miſapply what is not, ſtrictly, your

your own property, but only put into your hands for the benefit of others, you have no reaſon to believe, that God will confer upon you a certain and everlaſting poſſeſſion. How neceſſary is it, then, that you make a deliberate choice, whom you will ſerve! You will be ſupremely attached either to God or the world; and in proportion as you eſteem the one, the other will be diſregarded. It is impoſſible, that you can live in ſubjection to two maſters, whoſe demands are ſo directly oppoſite."

The Phariſees heard the ſolemn admonition; but they treated it with ſcorn, becauſe the love of money had the aſcendancy in their hearts, and the doctrine of Jeſus ſtruck at the root of that vile principle. The miniſters of God, like their great Exemplar, muſt expect to be derided by thoſe, whoſe practices and tempers they condemn: yet they ſhould not, on this account, keep ſilence. Jeſus reproved the hypocriſy of the Phariſees, in the moſt awful terms, declaring, that, while it was their object to preſerve appearances before men, God perceived their inward diſpoſitions, and that He looks with abhorrence on thoſe things, which ſhort-ſighted mortals may admire. Would to God, that every proud and covetous pretender to piety, whoſe reputation ſtands high in the Church, would ſeriouſly conſider the tremendous truth!

The Phariſees profeſſed a high regard for the Moſaic inſtitution. Our Lord, therefore, remarked to them, that this was deſigned to continue only till John the Baptiſt appeared; that in him God began to open the new diſpenſation, and to ſet up the kingdom of Meſſiah:

Meſſiah; and that of the benefits and bleſſings of that government, which he its harbinger proclaimed, men of all characters were now anxious and eager to partake. Still, he obſerved, the ancient law did not fail, as if it had not anſwered the end: for it received its completion in the Goſpel, which fulfilled the types and prophecies, and enforced the moral commands. In ſome points, particularly with reſpect to the ſacred and inviolable bond of marriage, they themſelves explained away or perverted its meaning, and he reproved them as guilty of adultery in divorcing their wives for every trifling cauſe of diſguſt.

Let us beware of the ſpirit of the Phariſees, and not be ſatisfied, as they were, with certain external obſervances in religion. It is poſſible, we ſee, that thoſe who pretend to be very zealous for duties, may be lamentably defective, and allow themſelves in groſs violations of the divine precepts. Let us enquire, then, how far our principles and practices agree. The higheſt veneration for the law ſhould diſpoſe us, not to reject, but embrace, the Goſpel. They both come from the ſame God, and harmonize in the ſame glorious plan. The Chriſtian revelation is, indeed, the perfection of every preceding economy, and by this eſpecially God eſtabliſhes the kingdom of his Son. Do we wiſh to ſecure its bleſſings? Then we are required to exert all the faculties of our ſouls; for "every man preſſeth into it." The faint deſire, the unoperative reſolution will leave us ſhort of heaven; the poſſeſſion of it is not to be gained without a holy violence.

Before

Before the ſame audience, and in order to enforce the foregoing admonitions, Jeſus proceeded to deliver an affecting parable. He deſcribed the future miſeries, which will follow a life of carnal indulgence, though pleaſant for a ſeaſon, and the everlaſting bleſſedneſs, to which the ſervant of God ſhall be admitted, however afflicted upon earth. A rich man is repreſented, expending his fortune merely for the ſupport of an elegant appearance and a luxurious table. His plan was, to allow himſelf every gratification, which his income would afford; but, while he conſulted only his own wiſhes, he conſidered not the neceſſities of others. A poor beggar, named Lazarus, incapacitated for any labour by a diſeaſed body, was placed before his door, imploring relief. This diſtreſſed object was neglected, except by the dogs, who licked his ſores, as if they were more compaſſionate than their maſter: but even this circumſtance ſhewed his calamitous ſituation, ſince he was covered with ulcers, which were expoſed to the open air, and at the ſame time he could hardly obtain the ſmalleſt crumbs for his ſubſiſtence. Death, however, ſoon put an end to the ſufferings of the one, and the enjoyments of the other; and then how different their condition! Lazarus, who was dear to God, notwithſtanding his extreme indigence, was conducted by a company of heavenly ſpirits to a diſtinguiſhed abode in the kingdom of bliſs and glory. The rich epicure might have the parade of a pompous funeral, but his grandeur followed him no farther. He was caſt into hell, and there conſigned to the torment of everlaſting fire; while the view of Lazarus's happineſs and exaltation increaſed

increaſed his own miſery. He petitioned, that the once deſpiſed beggar might be ſent to alleviate the excruciating agonies, which he endured from the fierceneſs of the flames: but this could not be granted. Deliverance from his pain, or even the ſmalleſt abatement of it, was denied; an impaſſable gulf ſeparated him from the ſociety of the bleſſed; and he, who had before enjoyed every delicacy, could not then obtain a drop of water to cool his parched tongue.

Five brethren ſtill ſurvived him, and all trod in the very ſame ſteps. He begged, therefore, that a ſpecial meſſenger might be ſent from the world of ſpirits, to warn them of thoſe extreme ſufferings, which awaited them. Perhaps he had been inſtrumental to their profligacy; and the deſire of preventing their deſtruction might ariſe from a fear of its aggravating his torment. The requeſt, however, was refuſed, on this ground, that the teſtimony of the inſpired writers was ſufficient for their conviction, and that thoſe, who rejected ſuch an evidence, would give no credit even to a witneſs riſing from the dead.

The whole repreſentation is tremendous, and yet moſt inſtructive. Who now will plead for a life devoted to pleaſure and ſenſual purpoſes? Who will preſume to ſay, There can be no harm in expending our fortune upon ourſelves? or that no bad conſequences will reſult from the gratification of our wiſhes, provided our income will ſupport it? Our Lord has ſhewn, that, by ſuch a conduct, the truſt repoſed in us is betrayed, the poor neglected, God forgotten and provoked, the ſoul debaſed and ruined, and a fire kin-

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dled againſt us, which will "burn to the loweſt hell," and which never can be quenched. Will not "the ſinners in Zion be afraid, and fearfulneſs ſurpriſe the hypocrites?" Ah! "who among us ſhall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us ſhall dwell with everlaſting burnings * ?"

We congratulate the faithful ſervants of God, though deſtitute as Lazarus. You poſſeſs a happineſs beyond the reach of the world, of which no afflictions can deprive you. Though you can hardly procure the meaneſt fare or the coarſeſt apparel; and though, while your diſeaſed bodies can ſcarcely endure the hardſhips of hunger, nakedneſs, and cold, you are the ſcorn of your opulent neighbours, yet we will call you bleſſed. Death, which ſtrikes a terror into others, may inſpire you with confidence and joy. For then you ſhall obtain perfect deliverance, and be "carried by Angels into Abraham's boſom."

Is it ſuppoſed, that ſtronger evidence is wanted, to convince men of the dangerous tendency of ſin? The ſacred ſcriptures declare it, with all the ſtrength and clearneſs, of which language is capable. The teſtimonies of departed ſpirits, who have entered upon the inviſible world, are withheld from us, and we have no right to aſk for them, or to conclude that they would be at all regarded by unbelievers. Let the word of God, then, be fairly conſulted, and its deciſions implicitly received; or elſe, we ſhall ſoon feel thoſe torments, which we are unwilling to credit.

* Iſa. xxxiii. 14.

After

After this interefting parable, Jefus addreffed himfelf again to his difciples, fuggefting certain cautions and directions for their conduct*. Some of thefe things had been faid before, but their importance rendered the repetition expedient and needful. He warned them againft giving any caufe of offence to others, obferving, that though in fuch a world as this, among creatures fo conftituted as we now are, cafes of that kind may be expected, yet they are attended with awful confequences. It is abundantly better to fuffer any calamity, and even to be cut off by a violent death, than to bring a reproach on the good ways of God, or to occafion the meaneft of his people to depart from them. In an efpecial manner, he exhorted them to beware of an angry and implacable difpofition, fince this would be peculiarly difgraceful to the Gofpel, and declared that their forgivenefs of injuries fhould be unlimited. How neceffary for ourfelves is this folemn counfel! "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil†:" for inconceivable mifchief may refult from any wrong practices or tempers obferved in your deportment. Many may be prejudiced againft the truth, and fome fo ftaggered, as entirely to renounce it, when they perceive that it produces fo little influence upon you. A contentious and quarrelfome fpirit is particularly unfuitable to your character; for, though frequent occafions of complaint may occur, you are to "fuffer long and be kind," and thus to prove that the Gofpel, which you receive, is a fyftem of peace and love.

* Luke xvii. 1, &c. † Pfal. xcvii. 10.

The

The Apoſtles, it ſhould ſeem, being affected by a ſenſe of their great difficulties, and their inability to ſurmount them through the weakneſs of their religious principles, earneſtly prayed unto the Lord, that he would increaſe their faith. For ſuch is the efficacy of this grace, that it will bear up the ſoul againſt the ſevereſt trials, ſtrengthen for the moſt arduous ſervices, preſerve in temptation, and ſanctify our inward diſpoſitions. But how frequently is it obſtructed in its operations! If the near attendants and moſt honoured ſervants of Jeſus lamented their deficiency in this reſpect, ſurely the moſt eminent believers now may with peculiar propriety exclaim, "Lord, increaſe our faith."

Jeſus reminded them, that the leaſt degree of it, though ſmall as a grain of muſtard ſeed, will produce wonderful effects, and enable the Chriſtian to perform duties, which would otherwiſe be as impoſſible, as the tranſplanting of a tree into the midſt of the ocean. Yet he taught them, after all their exertions, to aſſume no merit to themſelves, but to acknowledge that their obedience to God in every point was no more, than he had a right to demand, and that, as it added nothing to him, it gave them no claim upon him. According to this deſcription, we all are the ſervants of Jehovah, the great and ſovereign Lord, and ſhould attend to our proper work, till it be finiſhed, not looking for our complete reſt and enjoyment, before we have done the buſineſs aſſigned us; and even then we ſhall deſerve nothing. Surely a ſlight knowledge of ourſelves will diſpoſe us to confeſs, that "we are unprofitable ſervants,"

vants,"

vants," nay, remembering what we are, we ſhall not be unwilling to own, that we are miſerable offenders.

Jeſus continued to proſecute his journey to Jeruſalem through Samaria and Galilee, and ſcattered bleſſings as he went. Near to a certain village, into which he was about to enter, ten unhappy perſons, afflicted with leproſy, preſented themſelves before him. They ſtood, indeed, at a diſtance, as was required of them, leſt others ſhould be defiled by their loathſome diſorder. It was not, however, too far for the voice of the ſupplicant. Having heard of the power and grace of Jeſus, they implored his merciful regard. He looked on them with compaſſion, and inſtantly directed them to ſhew themſelves to the prieſts, who alone were authorized to decide, when the malady was removed. They obeyed his word in the believing expectation of a cure, and, as they were going, were healed. The influence of our great Reſtorer of life and health extended to the remoteſt places, as well as to the objects immediately within his view. The ſame miracle was wrought upon them all; but only one of them, it ſhould ſeem, and he a Samaritan, was properly affected with it. He returned to proclaim the kindneſs of his Benefactor, and his own obligations to him. With admiring and grateful adoration, he bowed at his feet, and with a loud voice gave glory to God. This inſtance of faith and love in a Samaritan, a ſtranger to the commonwealth of Iſrael, was a ſtriking reproof to the reſt. He, therefore, obtained the peculiar approbation of the Saviour, and was diſmiſſed in peace.

Have we been the ſubjects of Chriſt's healing power? Has not the leproſy of ſin ſpread its poiſonous infection over our ſouls? And ſhall we not cry to him, "Jeſus, Maſter, have mercy on us?" Thoſe, ſurely, who are reſtored by his grace, cannot but be thankful: yet alas! none of them feel ſo lively a ſenſe of his goodneſs, as they ought. Is there one out of ten, who gives glory to God with proper energy and zeal? And is not ingratitude, on ſuch an occaſion, moſt deteſtable? You, who have experienced deliverance by the power of Jeſus, return to praiſe him; and commend him to the notice and eſteem of others, while, with aſtoniſhment and love, you declare what he has done for you.

Perhaps he was arrived at the great city, or, at leaſt, was in the neighbourhood, when the Phariſees enquired of him, at what time God would eſtabliſh the kingdom, of which he had ſpoken ſo much. He replied, that they were deceived about the nature of this kingdom: that it would not be attended with ſuch external pomp and grandeur, as to excite general obſervation; but that, being inward and ſpiritual, it exiſted in the hearts of his people. He ſuggeſted alſo to his diſciples, that they would ſoon be longing for his appearance, in vindication of their deſpiſed cauſe, but warned them not to be miſled by impoſtors, who ſhould ariſe in great numbers. He declared, indeed, that after his paſſion, then approaching, he would manifeſt himſelf in a moſt awful manner, to take vengeance on his enemies; that coming, ſuddenly and terribly as the lightning, he would confound and deſtroy them. He foretold,

told, that many would be cut off in the midſt of their buſineſs, their gaiety, and ſenſuality, as in the days of Noah and of Lot, when thouſands periſhed, in the former caſe by the flood, and in the latter by fire and brimſtone from heaven. And, as this tremendous deſolation ſhould be accompliſhed ſo quickly, he directed his diſciples to flee for their lives, at the very firſt commencement of the troubles, without attempting to ſecure any of their poſſeſſions. He warned them to remember Lot's wife, leſt they alſo, through an attachment to worldly things, ſhould be involved in the general ruin. He predicted, that in this public devaſtation the moſt painful ſeparations would be made, the neareſt friends divided, the moſt intimate connections broken; ſo that, where two perſons ſhould be united in the cloſeſt bonds, the one ſhould be reſcued by a peculiar act of grace, and the other left to periſh.

It was enquired, where the terrible deſtruction would take place; and our Lord replied by a proverbial expreſſion, that the eagles would be gathered to the carcaſe. This ſeemed a plain intimation, that the Romans, whoſe enſigns bore the image of the eagle, ſhould be the inſtruments of that calamity, and that they would fly as thoſe ravenous birds to their prey. It might alſo be intended to imply, that, wherever obſtinate ſinners are marked for ruin, the judgments of God will find them out, and haſten with an unerring aim to accompliſh their perdition.

The awful ſubject will be afterwards reſumed. For the preſent, we obſerve, that the prophecies of Jeſus, which clearly referred to one ſignal event, were all in

due time exactly accompliſhed. Jeruſalem was given up to entire deſolation, the unbelieving Jews periſhed miſerably; and the Chriſtians, obeying our Lord's directions, obtained a memorable deliverance. Are we not, then, here inſtructed, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*?" And ſhould we not be ſolicitous to provide a refuge for ourſelves, againſt that day of more terrible calamity, when "the vials of the wrath of God ſhall be poured out" upon all impenitent ſinners, and there ſhall be no eſcape? Jeruſalem was deſtroyed for its contempt and rejection of the Goſpel; and, if God be ſtill jealous for the honour of his Son, what has Great Britain to expect? O may we know the time of our viſitation, and embrace the offers of mercy, which are held out to us, in the Saviour!

We enquire, then, with ſerious concern, of all, to whom the word of truth is preached, Are you members of the kingdom of God? Is it ſet up "within you?" It is declared to be "righteouſneſs, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoſt†." Have you underſtood what theſe bleſſings mean, ſo as to feel their efficacy in your own hearts? If not, you are as much ſtrangers, in reality, to the character of Jeſus, and as certainly obnoxious to the divine vengeance, as the unbelieving Jews. O flee from the tremendous ſtorm, while yet there is a poſſibility of eſcape! Be willing to make uſe of the appointed refuge; that, when the deſtroying Angel unſheaths the ſword, you may be protected from the ſtroke of juſtice.

* Heb. x. 31. † Rom. xiv. 17.

Probably

Probably with a view to encourage his disciples under the prospect of their approaching difficulties, Jesus exhorted them to pray, and to urge their requests with unceasing ardour *. Let us attend to his counsel: "Men ought ALWAYS to pray," at all times, and in all the various circumstances of life. Though many difficulties attend the practice of the duty, and our petitions seem to be rejected, we are "not to faint." Our fears may suggest, that "God hath forgotten to be gracious," and that it were vain to hope for his mercy; yet we are here taught, to renew our applications with fresh vigour, and "give him no rest," till he vouchsafe to grant us deliverance and comfort.

The efficacy of such continued fervour in our addresses to God, is exhibited in a short parable. A poor distressed widow, under great oppression, earnestly solicited the interference of a magistrate in her behalf, that she might obtain justice. He, being destitute of every good principle both toward God and man, refused for some time to undertake her cause; but at length he consented, merely that he might be freed from the trouble of her importunity. Jesus has directed us to draw the proper conclusion from this little history. The Lord God may seem regardless of the incessant cries of his afflicted people, for a considerable season: but still they should persevere in their ardent supplications, and expect his gracious interposition. Like holy Jacob, they should wrestle with him, and say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Then will he rescue them from the oppression of their

* Luke xviii. 1—14.

ſpiritual enemies, and ſatisfy the deſires of their ſouls. Yet, great as this encouragement is, how few are animated by it! Do not ſome appear ſo diſheartened, and ſo "faint in their minds," as to grow remiſs, and almoſt abandon their hope? Thus Jeſus lamented, that, upon his coming, he ſhould find but little faith on the earth. And ſhould this be the day of his viſitation among ourſelves, we fear that the number of firm and lively believers would be proved to be ſmall indeed. Ah! why do we diſtruſt his promiſe? Or, if we maintain our dependence upon it, why do we give way to ſo many diſtreſſing apprehenſions? Why are we ſo backward to the duty of prayer; ſo cold and languid in the performance? Surely we treat the Lord, as if we thought that he would not be true to his word.

Another parable, addreſſed to theſe, who boaſted of their own goodneſs, and looked down with contempt upon others, inſtructs us with what temper of mind we ſhould make our approaches to God. We may draw near with confidence, in reliance on the Saviour; but not with preſumption, as if we had a claim upon him, on the ground of our own merit. We are taught to bow before him with the deepeſt humiliation and abhorrence of ourſelves, confeſſing our iniquity, and imploring forgiveneſs through his free and abundant mercy, as revealed in the Goſpel. This is repreſented in the caſe of two men, a Phariſee and a Publican, who went to worſhip at the temple. Their principles and diſpoſitions were widely different; and very different alſo was the effect of their prayers.

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The Pharisee stood by himself, with much self-sufficiency, as if he should be polluted by coming near the Publican. His devotions, if such they may be called, contained not one petition; and, though he pretended to thank God, his object was to compliment himself, while he described his own excellency, and recounted the various services he had performed. He alleged, that he was far better than the generality of mankind, that he had avoided the gross sins, in which many others lived, and which might be charged upon the notorious character then present, and that he had also been exact in all ceremonial observances. Such was the detail of his goodness, such the only foundation of his hope towards God. And was not this "sacrifice an abomination unto the Lord?" Yes, a proud spirit is peculiarly odious to him; and he hath determined, "that no flesh shall glory in his presence." But are not many, under a Christian profession, worshipping with the temper of the Jewish Pharisee? Let his prayer be translated into modern language, and it would describe precisely the sentiments of numbers among us. We have many, who compare themselves with others, who boast of their virtue, their freedom from scandalous crimes, and their strict performance of certain customary rites. But what shall we say? Shall we not remark, as before, that so long as they exalt themselves, their most specious offerings, whether of charity or devotion, are offensive to God?

Another character, however, is here exhibited, and that of an acceptable worshipper. The Publican, or Roman tax gatherer, whose former life, it is probable,

had been ſtained with many enormities, was compelled under the terror of an awakened conſcience to humble himſelf in the preſence of God, and to deprecate his vengeance. He ſtood at a diſtance from the ſanctuary, and with eyes caſt down upon the ground; thus expreſſing his unworthineſs to draw near or look up to God. Nor was ſuch demeanour the only evidence of his feelings. Smiting upon his breaſt, through extreme anguiſh for his accumulated guilt, and confeſſing himſelf a ſinner obnoxious to juſtice, without offering any plea in his own favour, he prayed, that, if it were poſſible, God would extend his mercy to him. To ſuch a contrite penitent as this, however flagitious his conduct may have been, the promiſes of the Goſpel are addreſſed. " Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon *." This the Publican found: he went down to his houſe in peace, having obtained acceptance with God. How inſtructive, how animating is the example! It is recorded for our encouragement; and the declaration is added, to revive the heart of all thoſe who are ready to deſpond, " He that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted." For this abundant grace, indeed, we are indebted to him, who " died for the ungodly," and whoſe " blood cleanſeth from all ſin." Our application to God muſt be made in his name, and in dependence on his merits. But even the interpoſition of Chriſt will not avail us, unleſs we feel that " godly ſorrow which worketh repentance,"

* Iſa. lv. 7.

ance," and that deep humiliation which the Publican expreſſed. We may have been preſerved from groſs offences; but, if we be truly ſenſible of our guilt, we ſhall not be unwilling to be conſidered on a level with the worſt of characters, in the point of our acceptance with God, nor will any other prayer ſuit us ſo well, as that which is here provided, " God, be merciful to me a ſinner."

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 28.

Jesus, attending at the feast of dedication, gave sight to a man born blind—revealed himself to him, when excommunicated—described himself as the Door, and the good Shepherd—declared his union with the Father, and miraculously escaped from being stoned.

JESUS had now taken his leave of Galilee, and arrived at Jerusalem. There he attended at the celebration of a certain festival, which is supposed to have been kept in remembrance of the purification of the temple by Judas Maccabeus *. This was an institution only of human authority; but he did not on that account neglect it, and he has taught us by his example to pay a serious respect to those observances, which tend to the advancement of religion, even though they be not established by the divine command.

In such a world as this, objects of wretchedness present themselves on every side: but we may learn from Jesus, not to look on the distressed without feeling the tenderest emotions of compassion. As he passed through the streets of Jerusalem, he beheld with merciful re-

* John x. 22. 1 Mac. iv. 59. Joseph. Antiq. book xii. chap. 11.

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gard a poor beggar, who had been blind from his birth *. The disciples, taking notice of the unhappy case, proposed a question of curious speculation. They asked, whether the calamity was not to be considered as a particular judgment from God, for some heinous transgression committed either by the man or his parents. Possibly, they entertained the idea of a pre-existent state, and supposed, that the sufferings of this life are punishments for former sins. The Jews, at least, are said to have imbibed that absurd notion from the doctrines of certain heathen philosophers.

Jesus, however, without entering into a subtle disquisition upon the case, declared, that the affliction was appointed, not as a judicial visitation for any remarkable offence, but that the mighty power of God should be displayed by its miraculous removal. He further observed, that his time of service in this world, which he knew to be very short, must be diligently improved, in order to promote the great end of his mission, and that he should continue, during his abode here, to give light to them, that were in darkness. Let us make the application to ourselves. We, who are sinners, should always consider, that we deserve to bear distinguishing marks of the divine indignation. Wheresoever we perceive a poor sufferer, oppressed by heavy calamities, let us not curiously enquire into his crimes, but attend to our own, which merit a like, if not a severer, visitation. It may reconcile our minds to the most painful afflictions, to remember, what our Lord intimates, that they may be designed to promote the

* John ix. 1, &c.

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praiſe and glory of God. Let us not forget, how ſoon our day of labour and of uſefulneſs will be cloſed, that we may exert ourſelves with vigour for the benefit of others. If the Saviour ſhone as "the light of the world," what are our obligations? Are we not bound to fulfil the purpoſes of the life, which is given us? Shall we depart to the awful reckoning, before theſe are anſwered? If we would imitate our great Exemplar, we muſt not trifle away the few remaining moments in ſenſuality or ſupineneſs, or omit any one opportunity of rendering aſſiſtance to our fellow-creatures.

Jeſus not only attended to the cries of the diſtreſſed, but in ſome caſes granted relief, where it was not ſolicited, as in the inſtance before us. We obſerve, too, that, though all his miracles were illuſtrious, they were performed in different ways. In ſome a word or a touch ſufficed; in others, certain means were made uſe of, but ſuch as magnified his mighty power. He anointed the man's eyes with clay: but this, it muſt be allowed, ſeemed more likely to take away than communicate ſight. He then commanded him to waſh in the pool of Siloam; and inſtantly, upon this being done, the cure was accompliſhed. The efficacy, however, ſhould not be aſcribed to any peculiar virtue in thoſe waters, but to Him, whom by their ſignificant name they typified, "the Sent" of God. He alone, who ordered this ſingular expedient, could render it ſucceſsful. The ſame, we may remark, is evident with reſpect to his other appointments. The ordinances of his church are, indiſputably, weak in themſelves, and unable to impart any bleſſing to the ſoul. But he is pleaſed to

confer grace upon those, who frequent them in obedience to his directions, and in dependence on his promise. Let us therefore conform to his institutions with the simplicity of unfeigned faith, and his power will be therein displayed, for the relief of all our spiritual necessities.

The miracle was manifest, and it could not but engage the public notice, as the man, whose sight was restored, was generally known. All were astonished, but some were enraged; in consequence of which, pains were taken to disprove the fact, or by some means to cast an odium upon Jesus. This malignant opposition, however, tended to confirm the evidence, and publish it the more extensively. In like manner, modern infidels, by their hatred of the Gospel and assiduous attempts to invalidate its testimony, do really advance the cause which they mean to injure; and the more they resist God, the more his truth is established, and they themselves are confounded.

The man was summoned before the Sanhedrim, and closely examined concerning the change he had experienced, which he described with the most artless simplicity, and from which he declared, that he considered the author of it as a prophet. This occasioned a division in the council; some, with hypocritical sanctity, pretending, that Jesus had profaned the sabbath, because he had performed the miracle on that holy day, and therefore that he could not be of God; while others were constrained to acknowledge, from the evidence before them, that he could not possibly be an impostor. Some unfairness or collusion being suspected, endea-

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vours were uſed to diſcover the trick. The man's parents, therefore, were called and ſtrictly queſtioned. The fact, indeed, they openly aſſerted, and yet, through the fear of excommunication (which all were threatened with, who ſhould confeſs Jeſus to be the Meſſiah), they dared not avow their own convictions, but referred their examiners to the teſtimony of their ſon.

He was again interrogated by the rulers; and, while they with vehemence and bitterneſs reviled the Saviour as a worthleſs and profane wretch, the poor beggar ventured to plead his cauſe with confidence. He maintained before them all, that the miracle was undeniable, and the concluſion from it reaſonable, that Jeſus muſt have received his commiſſion from heaven. This provoked them the more; and inſtantly, without any other charge of guilt, they paſſed the very ſevere ſentence of excommunication upon him.

Whether, now, ſhall we moſt pity, the condemned perſon, or his judges? Ah! how odious their conduct, how miſerable their caſe, who, with inconteſtable evidence before them, ſtill hardened their hearts, and determined not to be convinced! He, though deſtitute of the advantages of education, and in a great meaſure ignorant of the real character of Chriſt, dared to act agreeably to his conſcience, and refuſed to depart from his teſtimony, whatever he might ſuffer. We aſk, then, Where are thoſe, who have courage enough, in the face of oppoſition, to vindicate the character of Jeſus? Can you ſpeak of any benefit, which you have received from him? Though unable to maintain an argument againſt ſubtle diſputants, can you declare, that he has communicated

communicated light to your mind, and ſay, as the poor beggar, if you can add no more, " One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I ſee?" By ſuch a ſimple evidence as this, many an unlettered peaſant has pleaded the cauſe of Chriſt with great ſucceſs, and ſometimes to the confuſion of the moſt learned adverſaries. But it may expoſe you to reproach and bitter perſecution. Be it ſo. What have you to fear, while you ſtand up for the honour of the Saviour? It is a ſervice, of which you ſhould not be aſhamed, and in which you need not dread any conſequences. Do not, therefore, ſhrink from it, or, as the man's parents, put it off to another; but come forth, and avow yourſelves the diſciples of Jeſus, whoever may, on that account, exclude you from their ſociety. He, whoſe intereſt you eſpouſe, will manifeſt his favourable regard to you, in due ſeaſon.

The poor outcaſt, it ſhould ſeem, underſtood but little of Jeſus, yet, being faithful to his convictions, he obtained further information. The Saviour ſought after him, that he might reveal himſelf to him. Upon being aſked, therefore, " Doſt thou believe on the Son of God?" he confeſſed his ignorance, but ſhewed, at the ſame time, that he was a ſerious enquirer after the truth, and eagerly deſirous of inſtruction. Accordingly, no ſooner had Jeſus explicitly declared himſelf to be that exalted character, than he cried out, with a holy rapture, " Lord, I believe;" and, to teſtify his unfeigned ſubmiſſion and dependence, he bowed down in devout adoration of him. Thus he received a double cure, and exhibited, by the change wrought both

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in his body and ſoul, unqueſtionable proofs of the power and grace of the Redeemer. How ſeaſonable was this manifeſtation to the excommunicated man, while he ſuffered under the ſevere and injurious ſentence! The Lord will adminiſter the neceſſary ſupport and conſolation to thoſe, who ſeek him in ſincerity; and he will ſelect the moſt ſuitable time and method for that purpoſe. Fear not, therefore, you, who are faithfully devoted to him, whatever may come upon you in his ſervice. We need not ſay, when the profane world turn away from you with ſcorn, but even when your deareſt friends caſt you off, for the truth's ſake, he will prevent you from ſinking under the trouble, and perhaps he may then favour you with peculiar diſcoveries of his ſalvation. In this confidence the royal Pſalmiſt triumphed, "When my father and my mother forſake me, then the Lord will take me up *."

But ſhould the queſtion be propoſed to us individually, "Doſt thou believe on the Son of God?" what anſwer could we return? Are not many, who aſſume the Chriſtian profeſſion, as far from the faith of Chriſt, as if they had never heard his name? If, however, with a teachable diſpoſition we aſk, how we are to conceive of him, or what regard is due to him, he himſelf will inſtruct us.

In addreſſing the man, to whom he had given ſight, he conveyed both information and encouragement, while he obſerved, that one grand deſign of his appearance was, to communicate the light of life to all, who feel and lament that they are deſtitute of it. But he

* Pſal. xxvii. 10.

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added, that he came alſo for judgment, as well as mercy, to expoſe their folly, who boaſted of their own underſtanding, and to ſeal them up in ignorance, who were too wiſe to be taught. Certain of the Phariſees, it ſhould ſeem, were preſent at the latter part of this declaration; and, conſidering themſelves as charged, by an oblique reference, with ſpiritual blindneſs, they were diſguſted. It muſt needs be offenſive to the pride of thoſe, who have acquired a reputation for learning and diſcernment, to be treated as intellectually dark, and having the ſame need of divine illumination, as the moſt illiterate. Jeſus, therefore, warned them, that they could not plead in excuſe for themſelves the want of information, and that a conceit of their own knowledge chiefly kept them in unbelief, and greatly aggravated their guilt and condemnation. This, ſurely, may furniſh a forcible exhortation to us, that we "lean not unto our own underſtanding," and that we pray earneſtly, not to be given over to a judicial blindneſs, but, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to diſcover "the truth as it is in Jeſus."

Our Lord continued his addreſs, with a particular view to thoſe falſe teachers, who rejected him *. Speaking in parabolical language, he declared, by a ſolemn aſſeveration, that whoſoever enters into the fold any other way than by the appointed door, is to be conſidered as an injurious and deſtructive intruder. He deſcribed the real ſhepherd, as approaching by the regular acceſs, which alone can be allowed, and gaining immediate admiſſion. To ſuch an one the care of the

* John x. 1, &c.

ſheep is intruſted: he watches over them with a tender regard to their different caſes and neceſſities; and they acknowledge him as their guide, ſupporter, and defender. But they will not pay the ſame reſpect to him, who is not thus connected with them, and yields not a due attention to their concerns. This was indeed an awful reproof of the Phariſees, who pretended to inſtruct the people, and yet underſtood not the only inſtituted method of ſalvation; and it was an intimation, that, whatever character they aſſumed, the true members of the Church would not ſubmit to them, but turn away from them with diſguſt. Yet they ſaw not the drift of the parable; and therefore Jeſus ſpake in plainer language to the following effect:

"I myſelf am that Door, to which I referred; and it is neceſſary, that every one, who would be a teacher of others, ſhould be properly acquainted with my mediatorial office, and cordially devoted to my ſervice. There have been thoſe, who have urged the ſame claims before, and many have preſumed to mark out for their diſciples a different courſe from that which I preſcribe; but they were deceivers and uſurpers, whoſe object was their own gain, and not the good of the flock. The faithful people of God, however, have always diſcovered the ruinous deluſion, and refuſed to be led by their influence. I am the only way of admiſſion into the Church; and he, who approaches to God in a real dependence upon me, ſhall be protected from all aſſaults of enemies, and ſhall find abundant ſupport and comfort for his ſoul, in the rich proviſions of the Goſpel. The arrogant intruder into the ſacred function of the

the ministry is a destroyer and murderer of immortal souls. But the purpose, for which I am come, is to bestow salvation in a larger measure, than has ever yet been known upon the earth."

"I, therefore, perform the office of "the good Shepherd," and am the very person, described by the ancient prophets under that title*: my people shall enjoy security and happiness, through my affectionate care for them; and I will render them every attention and service, which the most vigilant and compassionate shepherd can yield to his flock. Circumstances of peculiar danger may occur, which will try the strength of his regard for the sheep. In such situations, the man who has no property or concern in them, will not expose himself for their defence, but leave them to be dispersed and devoured by every beast of prey; while the real owner, who feels an attachment to them, will stand by them in all extremities, and hazard his safety, that he may ward off the assaults of the destroyer."

"This is the character, which I sustain for the benefit of my redeemed ones: and as a mutual love subsists between me and them, similar to that which the Father and I bear to each other, so, in the sincerity and fervour of my affection, I cheerfully give up my own life, to rescue them from perdition. My flock, also, extends beyond the limits of your nation: there are those among the Gentiles, however hopeless they may appear, who shall obey my call, and be incorporated into my Church, that all believers may constitute

* Isa. xl. 11. Ezek. xxxiv. 23. xxxvii. 24. Mic. v. 4.

one society under the care and protection of the same exalted Head. The Father himself is pleased with my attention to the welfare of my people, and with my voluntary undertaking for them. It is, therefore, our settled plan, and a part of the commission which I have received from him, that I should die and rise again. Of my own accord I lay down that life, which I could easily retain against all the violence of men and devils; and by the same sovereign power I can resume it, since it is not possible, that I should be imprisoned in the grave, contrary to my own will."

How interesting is the whole of this address! Who among us can be unconcerned about an admission into the fold of God, or the only possible mode of procuring that admission? Have we, then, diligently enquired for this appointed way; and do we consent to make use of it? It is more especially incumbent upon the teachers of religion to examine their principles. As they would dread the condemnation of the ancient Pharisees, and the odious appellation of "thieves and robbers," they should seriously consider, with what motives they assumed the sacred character. Have they been actuated by an unfeigned regard to Christ? Is he the sole ground of their dependence? And is it the grand object of their ministry to display his grace, and exalt his glory? Very mischievous indeed are the effects, which result from such persons undertaking to instruct others, as are themselves ignorant of the salvation of God. Many, many precious souls are deluded to their eternal ruin. Let us pray, therefore, that "the Church, being al-

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way preferved from falfe apoftles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true paftors, through Jefus Chrift our Lord *."

"The good Shepherd" can never be unmindful of his flock. Let us contemplate this defcription of him, till we feel an increafing ftrength and livelinefs of faith and hope, of love and joy. How amazing is that compaffion, which induced him to take notice of our wretched cafe! How fhould that depth of humiliation and fuffering, to which he fubmitted for our recovery, endear him to us! How fhould that tendernefs of regard, with which he provides for all the various cafes of his people, encourage our truft, and infpire us with confidence! But are we indeed "the fheep of his pafture?" Have we heard his voice, recalling us from our wanderings; and are we now content to abide in his fold? In dependence on him, do we go in and out, and feed upon the rich paftures of his grace? "All we, like fheep have gone aftray:" let us "now return unto the Shepherd and Bifhop of our fouls †," and pray that others alfo, though far off, may be brought nigh, and made one with us in him.

Our Lord's declarations produced different fentiments in his hearers. Some turned away from him with difguft, and in a contemptuous manner derided him as a demoniac and a madman, unworthy of any ferious attention. But there were thofe, who judged more favourably of him, both from the doctrines he advanced, and the miracles he wrought. Thus, alfo,

* Collect for St. Matthias's day.
† Ifa. liii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 25.

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the faithful preaching of the Gospel generally creates a division. It is no uncommon thing for men to speak evil of what they understand not, and to vent their enmity against the zealous advocate for Christ, by scornful reproaches similar to those, which were cast upon Him. And yet, such is the force of the truth, that, even in the midst of much opposition, some will be so impressed with it, as to exert their influence in its support. Let us "take heed, how we hear," and examine for ourselves, without being biassed by the objections of others.

Jesus was walking in the portico, which surrounded the temple, probably soon after his preceding discourse, when many of the Jews came about him, though with no friendly disposition. They desired a still plainer declaration from himself, whether or no he was the Messiah; and it is likely that they wished for it, as a ground of accusation against him. Jesus, therefore, reproved them for their unbelief, in disregarding his former claims, and referred them to his works, for a full demonstration of his divine character. He shewed their baseness in continuing to reject him, notwithstanding such accumulated evidence. It was a conduct, which clearly proved, that they belonged not to that favoured company, the sheep of his flock, all of whom acknowledge him as their Leader and Commander, receiving his doctrines, and obeying his directions. These, however reproached by men, he affirmed to be the objects of his peculiar notice, and secure, under the protection of his Almighty arm, from the assaults of their most powerful enemies. He has redeemed them

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to himſelf, and engaged to reſcue them from every danger, and conduct them to the poſſeſſion of eternal life. He added, that the Omnipotence of the Father is pledged for their defence, ſince he and the Father "are ONE," not in deſign only, but in nature and perfection, the ſame infinite and uncontrollable Being. As Jehovah, therefore, cannot be overcome, his people are invincible.

How clear and expreſs the declaration! Myſterious, we allow it to be; for we pretend not to comprehend the divine eſſence, or to explain, in what manner this union can ſubſiſt. But we maintain the real and proper Deity of the Saviour, on the authority of this infallible word; nor dare we make any difference or inequality, where the ſcriptures have forbidden it. We confeſs our obligation to "honour the Son, even as we honour the Father," and derive the ſtrongeſt hope and conſolation from the important doctrine.

This high claim gave great offence; and ſo it has ever done: but the furious oppoſition of men ought not to deter us from the cordial reception of the truth of God. The Jews took up ſtones to ſtone him, as they had done on a former occaſion *. What a tremendous ſight was this! Sinners riſing up with murderous rage againſt the Saviour, and arming themſelves for the deſtruction of "the Holy One of God!" Why did he not cruſh them in a moment, and conſume them in their iniquity? Or why does he bear with our perverſeneſs? Only becauſe he is "the Lord, merciful, and gracious, ſlow to anger, and plenteous in mercy †."

* John viii. 59.——Sect 23. † Pſal. ciii. 8.

With aſtoniſhing compoſure and mildneſs, he ſtood to expoſtulate with them on their unreaſonable conduct in recompenſing all his benevolent actions with ſuch barbarity. They pretended, indeed, a religious zeal; for they conſidered him, by what he had ſaid, as "making himſelf equal with God." Now had they miſtaken his meaning, is it not in the higheſt degree improbable, that he ſhould ſuffer them to continue in ſuch an error, without contradicting it? Yet in his reply he did not renounce, but confirmed and vindicated his claim.

He argued, that kings and rulers were in their ſcriptures called "gods *," as repreſentatives of Jehovah; but that he was infinitely ſuperior to them, and came, in a character peculiar to himſelf, immediately from the higheſt heavens; and therefore that he ought not to be treated as a blaſphemer for aſſerting his proper title and dignity. In ſupport of it, he ſolemnly appealed again to his works, which he called the works of his Father, being ſuch as none but Jehovah could perform, and maintained from them, what he had before affirmed, that he and the Father are one. This, ſurely, was clear and deciſive; nor can there need a comment to deduce the Godhead of Chriſt from theſe repeated declarations. The Jews underſtood him as advancing this very doc-

* Pſal. lxxxii. 6. It is ſuppoſed by ſome, that magiſtrates obtained this high appellation, only as types of the Redeemer, and as an intimation, that He would really be very God in himſelf, whereas they were ſtyled ſo merely with a reference to him. Accordingly, our Lord's argument has been expounded with a view to this ſenſe; and the interpretation certainly deſerves ſerious conſideration.

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trine, though they determined, through their pride and ignorance, to reject it: and therefore they renewed their attempts to destroy him. By a miracle, however, as on other similar occasions *, he escaped from their violence; since he had yet a few months longer to continue his labours on the earth.

A proper opportunity is here offered us, to warn those of their danger, who oppose the Divinity of the Son of God. Beware, lest, sinning as the Jews did, you "fall after the same example of unbelief." If their spirit and conduct were so odious, can your's be acceptable to him? Your error, if persevered in, will be destructive. For you cannot possess right affections towards the Saviour, nor yield him that reverence and submission, which he demands, unless you acknowledge, that he "is over all, God blessed for ever †." For the present, he bears with your petulance and folly, in resisting his claims; but at length he will arise to vindicate his right, to the everlasting confusion of all his enemies.

We have only to add, that, when Jesus withdrew from this persecution at Jerusalem, he retired to a distant part, even beyond Jordan, where John had formerly exercised his ministry. There many resorted to him, having been prepared, as it should seem, by the testimony of the Baptist, to receive him. These, therefore, without hesitation, believed on him, while the great and learned at Jerusalem rejected him with scorn. Thus the sin of some persons may eventually become the salvation of others. "The kingdom of God,"

* Luke iv. 30 John viii. 59. † Rom. ix. 5.

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when taken from those, who oppose, is given to such as will thankfully submit to it. Happy the people beyond Jordan, who were favoured with the presence of the Saviour, because they knew the time of their visitation! Let us fear for ourselves and our country, lest our perverseness should provoke him to depart from us; and therefore let us yield all serious attention to the word of truth, which we hear. O Lord, withdraw not the Gospel of thy grace, nor the influence of thy Spirit, from us! Here fix thine abode, and make us willing and obedient in the day of thy power. May we be added, as faithful members, to thy Church on earth, and conducted to thy heavenly kingdom, there to behold thy glory, and praise thee as one with the Father, world without end! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 29.

Jesus answered enquiries about divorces—shewed a tender regard to little children—replied to a young ruler—warned his disciples of the danger of riches—delivered the parable of the labourers in the vineyard—hastened to Jerusalem to suffer—cured two blind men near Jericho.

THE enemies of Christ, even while they seem to prevail, are subservient to his purposes: by their opposition to the truth, they are eventually the cause of its more extensive promulgation. Thus, we have seen, when Jesus was driven away from Jerusalem, the people beyond Jordan received the benefit of his ministry. To them he imparted his blessings with a liberal hand: for he was followed by great multitudes, whom he instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and healed of their various bodily diseases *.

Hither, also, the malice of the Pharisees pursued him. They came, with an intention of drawing him into some difficulty, or of prejudicing the people against him. They pretended to consult him on the subject of divorces, and asked, whether it were allow-

* Mat. xix. 1—12. Mark x. 1—12.

able for a man to dismiss his wife for every trifling reason. He knew their malevolent designs, and yet condescended to answer their enquiries. He referred them to the original institution of marriage, as delivered in their own scriptures, with which, he argued, the separations so prevalent among them were totally inconsistent. To this it was objected, that Moses had countenanced those divorces by an express law for the purpose *. Jesus replied, that a permission of that kind had indeed been granted to their nation, " on account of the hardness of their hearts," which might have produced worse mischiefs, but that such a toleration was repugnant to the first appointment of the sacred union.

The disciples resumed the subject in private, when he solemnly declared, that, if either of the parties so bound together put away the other, (excepting only for the cause of unfaithfulness) and entered into a fresh connection, it was adultery in the sight of God. The representation appeared so severe, that they judged it advisable to decline an engagement, which could not be annulled. But this was a wrong conclusion: for our Lord observed, that, though various reasons might lead men to celibacy, it should not be imposed upon any, and that those, who preferred it with a view of devoting themselves more entirely to God, should possess peculiar grace, suited to the circumstances of that state.

This may seem an uninteresting topic to some readers; but the licentiousness of the present age renders

* Deut. xxiv. 1.

it in an eſpecial manner neceſſary. "Marriage is honourable in all *;" yet few, we apprehend, proceed to it under the influence of right motives, in the fear of God, or with a real regard to their ſpiritual welfare. A ſudden and capricious attachment, the gratification of libidinous deſires, worldly expectations or convenience, are the grounds on which moſt perſons connect themſelves together; and in ſuch caſes, as there is no firmneſs of virtuous principle, the bond of union is more liable to be broken. Diſappointments enſue, diſguſt ariſes, a freedom of intercourſe becomes irkſome, a ſeparation is eagerly wiſhed for, and conſequences, moſt deſtructive to religion and ſociety, take place. How frequent are ſuch inſtances among us, particularly in what is called faſhionable life! So numerous are the applications for divorces to one branch of our legiſlature, as to conſtitute no ſmall part of the deliberations of that auguſt body. The many examples of contention and impurity, which are thus brought to light, ſtain the records of Parliament, diſgrace our profeſſion of the Goſpel, and expoſe our nation to the judgments of an incenſed God.

How much care and circumſpection, then, are neceſſary in the choice of a partner, with whom we are to ſpend our days! If we would attain real and abiding happineſs in ſuch a connection, it is indiſpenſably requiſite, that our inclinations be regulated according to the will of God, that we ſeek his direction and bleſſing, and aim at his glory. Thoſe, alſo, who are bound together by the marriage-covenant, ſhould maintain a

* Heb. xiii. 4.

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constant vigilance over themselves, lest, by any part of their spirit and conduct, they should excite disgust in each other, and render their union painful. Let them learn to "bear one another's burdens," and, by the exercise of patience, forbearance, and love, promote their mutual comfort and advancement in the road to heaven.

The dread of inconveniencies and trials should not, however, deter men from that which is God's own institution, and for which our very nature is formed. Few, we fear, continue single, on real principles of religion: few possess the grace, which is necessary for that state. The celibacy of many, it is evident, leads to licentiousness; and therefore it is their sin and reproach. While they boast of their liberty, and rove at large, for the indulgence of their passions, they are hastening their own perdition, and with much assiduity laying snares for the unwary, whose bodies and souls are sacrificed for a vile and momentary gratification. What aggravated guilt is here!

During our Lord's continuance in the same neighbourhood, the inhabitants regarded him with such veneration, that many presented to him their tender offspring, who were not capable of profiting by his instructions, requesting his solemn benediction and devout intercessions for them *. The disciples would have prevented it, and put them from him, unwilling that their Master's time should be occupied with infants, as he had other more important business to employ him. Jesus, however, shewed much displeasure at

* Mat. xix. 13—15. Mark x. 13—16. Luke xviii. 15—17.

at their officious interposition, and commanded that even the youngest children should be allowed a free access to him, inasmuch as the kingdom of God should consist of such members. He declared, also, as he had done before, that no person can belong to that holy community, who is not brought to a simplicity of disposition, resembling that of a little child. With the greatest complacency, therefore, and most amiable condescension, he took them up in his arms, and pronounced his blessing on them.

This occurrence may seem trifling, but it is replete with instruction. It should endear the Saviour to us, when we observe such decisive proofs of meekness and compassion in his character. And, since Jesus allows and invites those of tenderest age to come unto him, affirming them to be capable of being received into his kingdom, shall we forbid their admission into his Church, and exclude those, whom he has not excluded? The argument, drawn from this passage in favour of infant-baptism, though not direct, appears conclusive. For why did he shew such a regard to infants, but because they were the proper objects of his care and love, and might partake of his grace? Parents, therefore, may be encouraged to present their offspring to Christ, and entreat his kind attention to them. They may solemnly devote them to him in his Covenant by the initiating ordinance of baptism. That rite is to the father of a Christian family, what circumcision was to the father of a Jewish. We believe, that our whole house will be an acceptable offering to him,

and rejoice, that "the promiſe is unto us and to our children *."

The repreſentation here given ſeems particularly ſuited to engage the notice of our youngeſt readers, and to ſuch we would apply it. Inconſiderable as you may be thought in the world, you are not beneath the Saviour's regard. Let nothing, then, keep you from his arms, which ſtand open to receive you. While you hear him ſay, "Suffer them to come unto me, and forbid them not," be encouraged to have recourſe to him, whoever would prevent your approach. Caſt yourſelves before him, and implore his bleſſing. Surrender up your hearts, in willing ſubjection, that he may attach them to himſelf, and accompliſh in you the purpoſes of his mercy. Though your years have been few, you ſtand in need of redemption through his blood, and the ſanctification of his Spirit; nor will his grace be denied you, while you wait in humble faith and fervent prayer before him.

As he was departing from the place, in which the laſt occurrence happened, a certain perſon came running to him, evidently with much eagerneſs, and with profound veneration, acknowledging him as a divine Teacher. He kneeled down at his feet, and deſired information from him on a ſubject of all others the moſt important †. "Good Maſter," ſaid he, "what good thing ſhall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" Here, then, was a candidate for heaven, of a moſt pro-

* Acts ii. 39.

† Mat. xix. 16, &c. Mark x. 17-31. Luke xviii. 18—30.

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miſing appearance. He was young, yet not addicted to ſenſual pleaſures, for he attended with great exactneſs to the duties of morality, and diſcovered a ſerious concern about his future ſtate. He was a ruler, a magiſtrate of ſome conſequence, and poſſeſſed of conſiderable wealth. Yet, unlike the generality of thoſe in high life, he applied to Jeſus, not with a diſpoſition to cavil, but, as it ſhould ſeem, with a deſire of being inſtructed in the way of ſalvation.

The caſe was hopeful: and, from ſuch a view, we might have been ready to conclude that the man was a real convert. But a little experience will teach us, not to be precipitate in our judgment, nor to reſt with implicit confidence in any favourable appearances. Jeſus, who knew perfectly the bent of his mind, dealt with him in ſuch a way as to ſhew his true character. He enquired, therefore, why he had given him the title of "good," ſince it properly belonged only to God. He did not thereby diſclaim it, or in the leaſt imply, that he poſſeſſed not the attributes of Deity, but examined on what ground the amiable youth had ſo addreſſed him, and whether he had done it on a full conviction of his dignity. The ruler, probably, was elated with a conceit of his own goodneſs, and his ability to do every thing required: on which account, to detect his erroneous notions and evince his deficiencies, Jeſus referred him to the law, aſſuring him, that he muſt keep the commandments, in order to attain eternal life. We cannot ſo interpret this declaration, as to ſet aſide the neceſſity of believing in the Son of God for ſalvation, or aſcribe to man a power, in himſelf, of yield-

ing a complete obedience to his Maker. But there is a peculiar propriety in putting thofe, who boaft of their own righteoufnefs and ftrength, upon confidering the extent of their duty. We exhort them to bring forth their beft performances, that they may compare them with the appointed rule, and to try what their moft vigorous exertions can effect. "Keep the commandments;" but let one precept as well as another be regarded, and that in the utmoft extent, fo as to regulate your inward affections, no lefs than your outward practice. Such an unfeigned and perfect compliance is required from you at all times and in all circumftances, without wearinefs or interruption, even to your lateft hour. Upon the leaft failure, you are rendered incapable of being juftified by the works of the law, and, though decent and orderly in your conduct, can obtain forgivenefs no otherwife than by faith in the Lord Jefus Chrift, through the blood of his crofs.

This young perfon, not knowing himfelf and the defects of his obedience, prefumptuoufly boafted, that he had, from his earlieft years, performed every duty enjoined in the fecond table, to which he was referred, and, in the vain confidence of his own fufficiency, he then afked, whether any thing further could be demanded of him. Ah! how grofs the darknefs, how fatal the delufion, by which men are fo exalted in themfelves, as to fay, "I am innocent," or "What lack I yet!" Jefus, however, looked with compaffionate regard on the ruler, whofe manners and difpofition, in fome refpects, might be peculiarly engaging. But, as he refifted conviction in one way, he proved him in another,

requiring

requiring a ſpecial teſtimony of the entire ſubmiſſion of his heart to the divine will. " One thing," ſaid he, " thou lackeſt: go thy way, ſell whatſoever thou haſt, and give to the poor; and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven; and come, take up the croſs, and follow me." The ſtrict injunction was more than the youth could bear, but not more than Jeſus had a right to ordain: nor would thoſe refuſe to comply with it, who are truly ſenſible of their own demerit and the worth of the Saviour. The merchant, who finds the " one pearl of great price," will ſell all that he has, and buy it*: for he will ſay, " I count all things but loſs for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus my Lord †." Not ſo he, whom rank and fortune had ennobled. He was diſappointed, grieved, confounded; and inſtantly betrayed, what Jeſus meant to detect by the trial here propoſed, the ſecret inſincerity of his heart. He gave up all further enquiries about the religion of the Goſpel; " he went away ſorrowful," mortified with the ſeverity of the injunction, regretting his inability to comply, and, if unwilling to part with his pretenſions and his hopes, yet ſtill more reluctant to reſign his preſent attachments. He withdrew, preferring the enjoyment of his large poſſeſſions to the grace and ſalvation of Jeſus.

Ah! who can refrain from tears, on account of the promiſing youth thus departing from Chriſt, and at length, as we fear, periſhing in ſin? Yet ſimilar caſes frequently occur. We would aſk all thoſe, who ſeem deſirous to learn the way to heaven, Do you unfeign-

* Mat. xiii. 46. † Phil. iii. 8.

edly consent to the terms, which Jesus requires? He does not, indeed, say to you, " Sell whatsoever thou hast;" but he will certainly call you to make some painful sacrifices, as an evidence of your regard to him. You must, at least, be ready to relinquish the dearest objects in life, if he shall so appoint; nor are any of his disciples exempted from the obligation of taking up the cross, and following him through shame, contempt, and suffering. If you comply not with his demands, whatever they may be, you lack the one thing, an integrity of heart, an unreserved submission to him, for which no compensation can be allowed. Would you, then, depart from him? O think again, what the consequences must be! Those, who know your danger, tremble and weep for you, though you feel no pity for yourselves.

Jesus, being much affected, directed the attention of all the people, and especially of his disciples, to this occurrence, while he taught them the proper improvement. He declared, such are the snares of riches, such the obstructions which they cause to the spiritual life, that few persons in affluence will be disposed to receive the Gospel, or to pursue that course, which alone will conduct them to heaven. Much is to be given up, and many severe struggles to be endured in all situations; but those, whose hearts are attached to their worldly possessions, labour under peculiar difficulties, and it must be a miracle of grace indeed, which will enable them to make the necessary sacrifices, in the service of God, and for the attainment of his kingdom. The disciples were almost confounded at this intima-

 tion,

tion, and cried out, with inexpreſſible aſtoniſhment, "Who, then, can be ſaved?" Jeſus replied, that, though the ſtrength of man be inſufficient, the power of God will be effectual, to accompliſh the arduous work. To him, therefore, ſhould our fervent prayers be directed, that by his Almighty grace we may reſiſt and overcome the temptations, peculiar to our reſpective circumſtances in life.

But how few are aware of the danger of riches! Inſtead of fearing, do not almoſt all eagerly covet, an exalted rank? The affluent, in general, deſire no better portion than their temporal poſſeſſions, and conſider not that theſe may be the means of excluding them from the happineſs of heaven. On the very ſame principle, alſo, the poor repine at the appointment of God, when they ought to be thankful, that he has placed them in a ſituation the moſt favourable to religion. Surely, we ſhould be more anxious for ſpiritual advantages, than thoſe which are merely ſecular, and pray to be preſerved from the love of money, through which ſo many have forſaken Chriſt and periſhed eternally.

Upon Peter's remarking, that he and his brethren the Apoſtles had renounced all their worldly occupations, in their attachment to their Maſter, Jeſus aſſured them, that at the final conſummation, when he himſelf ſhall appear upon the throne of his glory, they ſhall obtain a diſtinguiſhed honour, and ſit with him in judgment on the twelve tribes of Iſrael. He added, alſo, for the encouragement of others, that thoſe, who incur any loſſes or ſufferings for his ſake, ſhall gain an

abundant recompenſe, inaſmuch as they ſhall receive even here, what will be a hundred-fold better to them in real ſubſtantial happineſs, and everlaſting life hereafter. Yet, in order to excite a holy jealouſy in all his followers, he declared, that many, who may now ſeem the foremoſt in profeſſion and privileges, ſhall in the end be found the fartheſt from God; and that ſome of thoſe, who are thought the moſt unlikely to be admitted into heaven, ſhall ſhine the brighteſt in it. O what "great ſearchings of heart" ſhould this produce in us! Are we acting agreeably to our high character, and the peculiar advantages we enjoy? Are we not afraid, leſt they, upon whom we look down with contempt, for their ſuppoſed inferiority, ſhould excel us in every good attainment? May not our very opportunities for improvement increaſe our future condemnation?

To illuſtrate and confirm the ſolemn admonition, Jeſus delivered a parable *. He compared the diſpenſation of the Goſpel to the conduct of a certain houſholder, who hired labourers for a ſtipulated ſum to gather in his vintage. The engagement was made with ſome of the ſervants in the morning, but with others at different hours, as at the third, the ſixth, the ninth, and even at the eleventh hour. Yet at the final reckoning there was no diſcrimination between them; the laſt being as acceptable, and receiving the ſame wages, as the firſt. This gave great offence; for it was thought unjuſt, that thoſe who had been employed the whole day, ſhould obtain no ſuperior diſtinction above ſuch as had

* Mat. xx. 1—16.

wrought only a ſmall part of it. The maſter, however, vindicated his own proceeding, on this ground; that he had done no injury to any of them, and that, as he had an abſolute right to beſtow his favours where he pleaſed, none ought to object to that particular kindneſs, with which ſome were treated.

We cannot be at a loſs for the proper application. The Lord God by his word calls us to a laborious ſervice; and, till we obey that call, we are idle, as to the great buſineſs of life. He has ſent out his meſſages of mercy to different nations at different periods of the world. The Jews were firſt admitted into the Church; and the Gentiles, though they reſembled the workmen, who were hired at the laſt hour, obtained equal privileges. In like manner, alſo, perſons are brought under the influence of divine grace at various ages; ſome being ſanctified from their very infancy, while others, after a long courſe of profligacy, almoſt in a dying ſtate, are recovered and ſaved. Many objections are raiſed againſt ſuch a diſpenſation; and the arrogance of men preſumes to call the God of heaven to account. The Jews could not bear that the Heathens ſhould be fellow-heirs with them. The Phariſees, likewiſe, quarrelled with the Saviour, becauſe Publicans and ſinners met with a favourable acceptance from him: and to this day there are thoſe, who think it diſhonourable to his character to take ſuch into his family, as have grown old in the ſervice of iniquity.

Is not this conduct, then, to be vindicated? We perceive the ſovereignty and freeneſs of his grace; and

ought it not to excite our admiration, love, and praiſe? Surely, he has a right to call what perſons, and by whatſoever methods, he ſhall pleaſe. If we be the diſtinguiſhed objects of this mercy, we ſhould feel the ſtrongeſt emotions of gratitude; nor ſhall we have any cauſe to complain, though others, in a condition ſeemingly more deſperate, be ſaved upon the ſame terms with ourſelves, or even be preferred before us. Shall we dictate to him, how to diſpenſe thoſe favours, which none can claim? And would it not argue an odious malevolence in us, to murmur at his extenſive kindneſs toward thoſe, who have been moſt abandoned? If that be our temper, it is probable, that ſome, whom we may deſpiſe for their ignorance and profaneneſs, may enter into heaven, and we ourſelves, with our preſumptuous expectations, be for ever caſt out. Let us not depend upon an external profeſſion: among the thouſands, to whom the Goſpel invitation is publiſhed, but few comparatively are choſen to final ſalvation.

At length our Lord departed from the country, to which he had fled, and ſet out on his laſt journey to Jeruſalem *. He knew, that the appointed time of his ſufferings approached; and yet, with a full view of all that was coming upon him, he haſtened to finiſh his work. So great was his ardour in advancing towards the murderous city, where he was to lay down his life, that his diſciples, being aware of danger, were filled with amazement and terrified at the proſpect before them, as they followed him in the way. To prepare

* Mat. xx. 17—28. Mark x. 32—46. Luke xviii. 31—34.

them

them for the awful ſcene, he reminded them of the calamities, which awaited him, and predicted, in a clear and circumſtantial manner, that he ſhould be betrayed, condemned, delivered to the Roman power, mocked, ſcourged, ſpit upon, and taken off by the ignominious and excruciating death of the croſs: yet he added, that he ſhould be finally victorious by riſing again on the third day. This was a remarkable prophecy, expreſs, and frequently repeated; but even the twelve could not comprehend its meaning, which was rendered obſcure by its repugnance to their prejudices and expectations. Let us contemplate the love of the Redeemer, till our hearts burn within us. How great was his eagerneſs to accompliſh our ſalvation, ſince his alacrity and vigour increaſed, as he ſaw his agonies approaching! Let us not ſhrink from his ſervice, though we may meet with ſevere and complicated trials, but go forth with cheerfulneſs and zeal to the work aſſigned us, content to "ſuffer with him, that we may be alſo glorified together *."

But what do we hear, after this ſolemn declaration? A moſt unſeaſonable petition was preſented to Jeſus from two of the Apoſtles. James and John ſolicited, through their mother, that they might poſſeſs the chief poſts in his kingdom. Probably, they ſtill retained the expectation of his erecting a temporal dominion, and wiſhed to ſecure the higheſt preferment. Conſidering the perſons, from whom the requeſt came, and the occaſion, on which it was offered, we cannot but be aſtoniſhed. Yet the ignorance, pride, and perverſe-

* Rom. viii. 17.

neſs,

neſs, which remain in the beſt characters, will ſufficiently account for the inconſiſtency.

Jeſus very ſharply reproved them for their unſuitable and ill-timed application, and warned them, that they ſhould ſoon be called to partake with him of extreme ſufferings, which with a vain ſelf-confidence they profeſſed their readineſs to do; but he declared, that the chief honours of his kingdom were already diſpoſed of in the counſels of his Father. The ten other Apoſtles were alſo diſpleaſed with them for the deſire they had expreſſed; but even in this, it ſhould ſeem, they too diſcovered a temper of mind equally blamable, as being actuated by envy and reſentment. O Lord, ſubdue in us all carnal affections! For, while we behold ſuch a ſtrength of corruption in thy favoured companions, we tremble for ourſelves.

This was a ſuitable occaſion, and Jeſus embraced it, for inculcating thoſe diſpoſitions and principles, which diſcriminate and adorn his people. He ſhewed, that, inſtead of that thirſt for power and worldly diſtinctions, which prevailed among the Heathens, they ſhould poſſeſs a peculiar humility and meekneſs, a willingneſs to give up their own eaſe and conſequence, and a readineſs to ſubmit to the meaneſt and moſt arduous ſervices, for the real intereſt and happineſs of others. He himſelf had ſet them an example of this generous condeſcenſion, in relinquiſhing a ſtate of glory, appearing in the very loweſt condition upon earth, and conſenting to ranſom the captive ſouls of men at the price of his own blood. If we, then, profeſs to follow the Saviour, we ſee what tempers become us. And are

we willing to forego our own accommodations, that we may render ourſelves uſeful in the world? Is the pride of our hearts ſubdued? Do we indulge no ambitious deſires or expectations? Is "nothing done through ſtrife or vain glory?" And do we "mind not high things, but condeſcend to men of low eſtate *?" Theſe enquiries will ſhew, that few reſemble the meek and ſuffering Saviour, and that there is very little of genuine, practical Chaiſtianity among us.

Jeſus paſſed through Jericho towards Jeruſalem, and as he went out of that city, attended as uſual by a large company, an opportunity was offered for the diſplay of his power and compaſſion. Two diſtreſſed objects †, totally deprived of ſight, ſat by the road, imploring relief; and learning that Jeſus of Nazareth was at hand, (of whoſe character and miraculous operations they had been previouſly informed) they exclaimed aloud, profeſſing their faith in him as the promiſed Meſſiah, and earneſtly ſoliciting his merciful interpoſition in their favour. They were reproved by the multitude, and charged to deſiſt from their clamour. Feeling, however, the urgency of their own caſe, they renewed their petition with the greater importunity, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David." A cry

* Phil. ii. 3. Rom. xii. 16.

† Mat. xx. 29, &c, Mark x. 46, &c. Luke xviii. 35, &c. St. Mark and St. Luke mention but one of theſe caſes, and St. Mark introduces the very name of this beggar Bartimeus, the ſon of Timeus, probably becauſe he was the moſt noted perſon, and the chief ſpeaker upon the occaſion.

like

like this, he never disregarded, and therefore, with the most gracious condescension, when he had called them to him, he granted their request. Immediately, by his touch, he restored their sight, and gave a public approbation of their dependence upon him. Nor was this all: his love won their hearts and constrained them to follow him, while with gratitude and joy they glorified God for their great deliverance.

Are not we, also, under the strongest obligations to adore, and praise, and serve this merciful Redeemer? We cannot too frequently remark, that we all stand in need of his help, if not for the cure of an afflicted body, yet for the removal of our spiritual maladies. And here we have an emblem of one great blessing, which he bestows, and of his kind attention to every distressed supplicant. He renews our disordered faculties, and refits them for their proper use: He "openeth the eyes of the blind."

You, therefore, who hear that Jesus passeth by, implore the effectual interposition of his power and compassion in your behalf. O cry to him, and never cease your importunate requests, till he vouchsafe a gracious answer! There are those, perhaps, who will rebuke you, and charge you to desist. But, instead of being thereby deterred, be excited to pray the more fervently, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." He will listen to your voice, and permit you to spread your wants before him. Is it not your desire, that he would communicate spiritual light to your minds? He will readily grant it, if only you can depend upon him. Then, having obtained the object of your peti-

tion,

tion, endeavour to ſhew your gratitude to your heavenly Benefactor. Follow him in the way wherein he leads, praiſe him for his mercy, and teſtify his goodneſs to others, that they alſo may be induced to give glory to his name. The Son of David is worthy to receive all honour, and love, and worſhip, and obedience, throughout all generations. Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 30.

Jesus visited Zaccheus the publican, who became a true convert; and, as he approached to Jerusalem, he delivered the parable of the ten pounds.

The city of Jericho had been formerly rendered famous by the remarkable triumph, which Joshua there obtained. In this same spot the Lord Jesus triumphed by his grace, and erected a trophy in proof of his victory over Satan. He had already manifested his high character, in the confines of the town, by giving sight to the blind: but a more illustrious instance of his power and mercy is now to be exhibited, in the conversion of a notorious sinner. Let us "praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." How many witnesses declare, that He is "mighty to save!" Every fresh example encourages our application to him and dependence upon him. May his Spirit work effectually in us, that, while we contemplate his free and extensive kindness to others, we also may partake of his great salvation!

As Jesus passed through Jericho, he was attended by an immense concourse of people. Perhaps, also, the

the miracle, which he wrought there, added to his train. One of this numerous company is ſelected for our peculiar notice; and his caſe is conſidered by the ſacred hiſtorian as ſo intereſting, that it is introduced with a mark of admiration *. "Behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the Publicans, and he was rich." By his rank in life, as principal of the tax-gatherers, having many collectors under him, he poſſeſſed no ſmall influence, and had raiſed an ample fortune. A ſituation this, moſt unfavourable to religion! Power and wealth are great hindrances in the way of ſalvation: thoſe, who are moſt exalted in the world, ſeem the fartheſt removed from the very means of converſion. They are, as it were, fenced round with ſtrong barriers, which prevent an acceſs to their hearts. When ſuch perſons, therefore, become "obedient to the faith," the hand of the Lord is illuſtriouſly diſplayed in the change. His grace is effectual to ſurmount all difficulties; when He is pleaſed to work, none ſhall let it †: "even the rich among the people ſhall entreat his favour ‡."

But Zaccheus had, alſo, been a man of baſe character and iniquitous conduct; covetous, unjuſt, and oppreſſive. And ſome may be ready to aſk, Can ſuch an one obtain mercy? Or is it probable, that Jeſus ſhould ever look with a favourable regard upon him? Yes: the very man before us is ſingled out as a monument of his mercy, in order to ſhew, that he can pardon, ſanctify, and ſave the chief of ſinners.

* Luke xix. 1—10. † Iſa. xliii. 13. ‡ Pſal. xlv. 12.

Zaccheus,

Zaccheus, it ſhould ſeem, ſought not for any acquaintance with Jeſus, but, probably, was induced by mere curioſity to mix with the multitude, that he might gain a ſight of the remarkable perſon, of whom he had heard ſo much. But not being able to gratify his wiſhes, on account of the crowd and his own diminutive ſize, he mounted up into a tree by the ſide of the road, that he might have a diſtinct view. Jeſus obſerved him, and called to him by name, deſiring him to come down, and expreſſing an intention of being his gueſt. Thus our Lord was the firſt to propoſe the viſit; and, by this unſolicited favour, he "prevented him with the bleſſings of goodneſs."

We rejoice, when the careleſs and profane are brought by any motive to attend, where Jeſus vouchſafes his preſence. Very frequently they obtain thoſe benefits which they never coveted or ſought. Various inducements may lead them to the place, where the divine ordinances are adminiſtered, and the truth of the Goſpel is faithfully declared; ſuch as general cuſtom, habits of education, the ſolicitations of others, ſome ſtrange reports about the preacher or the doctrine, and an inquiſitive deſire to know, what can attract ſo large a concourſe of people. Now, however weak or wrong theſe reaſons may be, we would ſtill encourage them to come and ſhew themſelves, where the Saviour paſſeth by. Perhaps, he may unexpectedly look upon them, and reveal himſelf to them, as he did to Zaccheus. Thus, in many caſes, repentance, faith, and love have been ſuddenly produced under thoſe means, which were firſt reſorted to through an idle curioſity. They, who meant

meant to be mere ſpectators, or captious critics, have found themſelves deeply intereſted: their hearts have been inſtantly impreſſed and changed; ſo that they have departed with ſentiments and diſpoſitions, very different from thoſe, which they brought with them. Jeſus beholds them with compaſſion, and, even before they offer up a prayer to him, ſpeaks effectually to their conſciences, and attaches them inſeparably to himſelf. In the converſion of every ſinner, the unmerited grace of God is glorioufly diſplayed; but in theſe inſtances more eſpecially it appears at once, that "boaſting is excluded;" and that their love to the Saviour is properly the fruit of his love to them; that "they have not choſen him, but he hath choſen them *."

The call was no ſooner given to Zaccheus, than it was cheerfully obeyed: and it is of importance to remark the aſtoniſhing alteration, which he immediately diſcovered. The effect, however, muſt be aſcribed, not only to the word of Chriſt, but to the divine Spirit, which rendered that word ſo powerful. With eager haſte the rich Publican came down from the tree, where he had taken his place, and received his illuſtrious gueſt with impreſſions of lively joy. He could not but be ſurpriſed to hear a perfect ſtranger to him, as he might conceive, addreſſing him by name, and propoſing to abide at his houſe: but it is evident, that he inſtantly felt a conviction of the high dignity of the Perſonage before him, and conſidered the offer as an act of gracious condeſcenſion. His heart, therefore, being firſt opened, he was glad to admit the divine vi-

* John xv. 16.

 ſitant

ſitant within his doors, and thought himſelf honoured by his preſence.

Is this the reception, which the Saviour meets with among ourſelves? How few yield a ready obedience to his word! "He hath called, but we refuſed: He hath ſtretched out his hand, and no man regarded *." Is there, even with you who profeſs an attention to his Goſpel, any thing like that affectionate attachment to him, which Zaccheus ſhewed? Would you conſent that he ſhould abide with you; and would you rejoice to furniſh an entertainment for him? He is, indeed, removed from the earth; but you have many of his repreſentatives around you, and you are required to evince your love for him, by your kindneſs to them. Do you, then, ſearch out his poor members, that you may miniſter to their neceſſities? Do you embrace every opportunity of relieving them? And are you thankful for the exalted privilege? This fruit of divine grace we obſerve in Zaccheus. While he made a public confeſſion of his former wickedneſs before Jeſus and all the company, he wiſhed to teſtify the ſincerity of his repentance. He, whoſe grand object had been to amaſs worldly treaſures, was no ſooner acquainted with the Saviour, than he expreſſed a willingneſs to give up a large ſhare of his wealth, for the ſupport of the indigent. He declared his determination to conſecrate his ſubſtance to the Lord, by devoting even the half of it to charitable purpoſes. The ſame extenſive diſtribution, according to that exact diviſion of our property, is not binding upon us. But we are ſtrangers to the

* Prov. i. 24.

love of Chriſt, if we ſhut up our bowels of compaſſion from the afflicted, nay, if we do not "open our hand wide unto them," as God hath proſpered us. Ah! how many warm advocates for the Goſpel betray their inſincerity, by "having an heart exerciſed with covetous practices *!"

But you are required to be juſt as well as liberal; for God ſays, "I hate robbery for burnt-offering †." If there be any diſhoneſt gain in your poſſeſſion; if you have enriched yourſelves by fraud or extortion; it is ſurely known unto God, and an explicit confeſſion ſhould be made. Thus the Publican acknowledged his baſeneſs in oppreſſing the people by a violent and injurious execution of his office. But you muſt do more, than merely declare your ſorrow for the paſt. Nor is it enough for "him that ſtole, to ſteal no more;" you muſt not retain in your hands, what you have wrongfully taken from another. Suppoſe not that by giving a pittance of it to the poor your guilt will be expiated: for ſuch charity is continued theft. It is not your's to beſtow: it is another's property, and if you can find the owner, you muſt reſtore it.

This ſtrong and neceſſary evidence of ſincere contrition appeared in Zaccheus. "I am ready," ſaid he, "not only to relinquiſh the full amount of what I have gained from any perſon by falſe charges, but to return him four times as much ‡." In many caſes it may be difficult to ſettle, what particular compenſation is proper: and we fear that few are troubled with any ſcruples upon the ſubject. But let every

* 2 Pet. ii. 14. † Iſa. lxi. 8. ‡ See Lev. vi. 1—5.

reader make a faithful appeal to his confcience, and attend to its report. Have all your paft tranfactions been conducted, according to the rules of truth and equity? Have you no painful remembrance of any fraud or extortion, which you have practifed? And are you not concerned to make all poffible reparation for whatever injuries you have done? If you refufe this as a degree of precifenefs, which is needlefs or abfurd, talk not of your Chriftianity; your hypocrify is moft glaring. "Go your way; firft be reconciled to your brother," by offering reftitution and fatisfaction, according to your ability, before you pretend to devotion.

Jefus himfelf, who "knew what was in man," bore an unqueftionable teftimony in favour of Zaccheus, declaring that he had that day obtained falvation, and proved himfelf a real child of Abraham. This could not be on account of his defcent merely, but becaufe he had the faith of Abraham, and experienced the renovation of the Holy Ghoft. Probably, he arofe in the morning ignorant, carelefs, and profane; but before night how great a change took place! He received a new heart, the forgivenefs of his fins, and the affurance of divine favour. How extenfive, and how powerful is the grace of God! Has it produced fuch effects as thefe in us? It is of little confequence, whether the transformation be fudden; but is it certain? Has the Saviour vifited us with the bleffings of redemption? To "as many as receive him, he gives power to become the fons of God, even to them that

believe on his name *." "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise †."

'Who shall object to this? The very mercy of God, which should draw forth praises from every tongue, frequently excites disgust. Some appear unwilling, that atrocious offenders should be saved at all, or at least that pardon and eternal life should be offered to them on the same terms, as to themselves. There were those, who cavilled at the conduct of Jesus, for the kind notice which he took of Zaccheus, whose character was generally accounted infamous. But he vindicated himself on this ground, that the very end, for which he came into the world, was "to seek and to save that which was lost;" and therefore he was acting agreeably to his grand design, in using means to rescue them from destruction, whose case seemed of all others the most desperate. Justly may we rejoice in this representation. We have no right to despise any persons, as if we might claim a preference; for the whole human race, having departed from God, are equally involved in ruin, and unable to extricate themselves. But Jesus appears for our help, and accomplishes deliverance for us: nor is any sinner sunk so low, as to be beyond the reach of his mercy. He proposes salvation to us, and earnestly solicits our acceptance. Various methods he adopts for the recovery of our souls: let us not resist him, but yield ourselves in cheerful subjection to him, that his grace may reign in us unto eternal life.

* John i, 12. † Gal. iii. 29.

After the conversion of Zaccheus, Jesus pursued his journey towards Jerusalem. Upon his nearer approach to the city, his followers expected that he would immediately assume the pomp and power of an earthly monarch, and establish an universal government *. To correct these mistaken notions, he delivered a parable, in which he represented the nature of his dominion, and the opposition made to it, and admonished them, that the proper business of his people is, not to be solicitous for secular honours, but to employ themselves diligently in their appointed work, till he shall come again, when he will receive his faithful servants to himself, and destroy his enemies.

A nobleman, or prince, departed to a distant country, to be invested with full powers for the possession of a kingdom, to which he was heir; and then he proposed to return in all the glory of majesty. But, in the mean time, many of those, who from their peculiar relation to him were more especially bound to submit to his authority, with great malignity declared their firm determination to resist and reject him in his regal character. This is exactly the case with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is One of illustrious origin, of high descent, as "the only-begotten of the Father," and "Heir of all things," concerning whom Jehovah himself hath sworn, "That unto Him every knee shall bow, every tongue confess †." But his universal sovereignty was not to be established during his abode on earth, which was intended to be a state of profound humiliation. "He came not to be ministered unto,

* Luke xix. 11—28. † Isa. xlv. 23. Phil ii. 10, 11.

but

but to minifter." In order to enter upon his government, it was neceffary for him to quit this world and afcend to his Father: and then the fceptre was delivered into his hands. At the appointed feafon he will return with all the enfigns of royalty, and with irrefiftible power. He will come in his glory; and that fhall be the day of his triumph.

For the prefent his dominion is not generally acknowledged. The Jews efpecially, who were his own people more than others, and ought to have fubmitted to him with joy, have fhewn a moft malignant oppofition to him, and folemnly renounced him as their ruler. But, without further notice of them, the queftion for ourfelves is, Do we reverence the Saviour, as we ought, in his regal office? The kingdom is His: do we rejoice in it? Do we cordially confent, that "this man fhall reign over us?" Are we looking for his future advent? What reception may we expect from him, when he appears? Or, what fhould be our deportment, till he return?

The prince, here defcribed, left his ten fervants behind him with the care of a certain portion of money. Ten pounds were committed to their management, of which they were charged to make a diligent ufe, during his abfence. Under thefe circumftances the difciples of Jefus are placed. They profefs fubjection to him, and they fhould act at his command. Their very name, as they are "fervants," implies their obligations to work, agreeably to his directions. They are intrufted with various advantages, one in one way, and another in another; and thefe they are

 required

required to improve, as men in trade, that they may turn them to the moſt profitable account. It is intended, indeed, that they, who are faithful to their Maſter, ſhall be ſharers with him in the future glory of his kingdom: yet for the preſent they are appointed, not to any high honours or diſtinctions in the world, as ſome perſons then vainly dreamed, but to a poſt of labour and difficulty; and their moſt vigorous efforts are neceſſary, in the buſineſs aſſigned them.

The prince returned in full poſſeſſion of the ſovereignty, which he had expected, and ſtrictly examined his ſervants, what benefit had accrued from their uſe of the money committed to them. Two of the number, by their fidelity and diligence in commerce, had made conſiderable improvement of their ſtock, though one of them was far inferior to the other. Both came and acknowledged their obligations to their lord, as if they had ſaid, "We are indebted to thee for the advantages beſtowed upon us; and the increaſe, we have gained, muſt be aſcribed to thy favour, which enabled us to maintain our occupation, rather than to our own wiſdom and good management." The conduct of both was approved and publicly commended; and they were then appointed to a ſtate of exaltation and dignity, proportioned to their reſpective exertions and uſefulneſs in the ſervice of their maſter.

The day of reckoning is at hand, and it will ſoon appear, what good we have done in our place, what profitable purpoſes have been promoted by our various opportunities. The diſciples of Jeſus, under the influence of his grace, are all active; and, by a faithful

attention

attention to their Lord's concerns, they render themſelves a bleſſing in their generation; though in different ways, and in different degrees. "When he ſhall appear, they ſhall have confidence, and not be aſhamed before him at his coming." The moſt eminent of them will not then preſume to boaſt of their own works or their progreſs in holineſs; but they will all praiſe him for the efficacy of his Spirit in them, and for the advancement of his own glory by their weak and unworthy efforts. They will ſay, therefore, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee *." But their labour ſhall receive a diſtinguiſhed recompenſe: Jeſus will profeſs himſelf well-pleaſed in them, and admit them to a participation of his own honour and felicity, according to the various meaſures of their zeal and fidelity in his cauſe. O be animated, you that ſerve him, while you "have reſpect unto the recompenſe of the reward!" Be rouſed from your ſloth: for are not your languid exertions very unſuitable to ſuch high expectations? Are you trading with your pound, to any beneficial purpoſe? What is the increaſe, which you have gained? O "be not wearied nor faint in your minds:" but "hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt †!"

A third character, very different from the two preceding, is here alſo exhibited. He had made no uſe at all of the advantages intruſted to him: for he had not traded with his pound. He had not, indeed, ſquandered it away in diſſipation, but, neglecting to improve

* 1 Chron. xxix. 14. † Heb. xii. 3. 1 Pet. i. 13.

it,

it, "laid it up in a napkin." He is represented as pleading in his own excuse, with great insolence, that his lord was a severe and rigid master, who exacted such services, as he had no right to, and for which he would not grant sufficient strength and ability.

This is the case with many, who are admired in the world. They are satisfied with doing no harm, and see not their obligations to be active and useful in their Christian calling. They live, therefore, a quiet, indolent life; and can scarcely be said to have a place in existence. If we enquire of them, why they decline the work of the Lord, they are always ready to complain of insurmountable difficulties, and express hard thoughts of God, as requiring more than is reasonable, and more than they can possibly perform. But, without examining the truth or justice of these pleas, we observe, that their very excuses will turn to their own confusion.

The master convicted this indolent man of the most palpable inconsistency, and argued, that, even on his own principles, he ought to have made some use of his money. He declared, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." Thus it will appear at the last, that sinners are not influenced by their own foolish pretences, that their negligence is unpardonable in every view, and that what they urge in their defence will furnish sufficient ground for their condemnation, as evincing their rooted enmity against God.

The pound was taken from him, who was too slothful to improve it, and given as an additional recompense to the person who had been most assiduous. And this,

this, we are assured, is agreeable to the general dispensations of God. He will put the most honourable distinction on them, who discover the greatest fidelity and diligence; but those, who through disaffection refuse to exert themselves for him, will be deprived of all their advantages, and never allowed another trial. May we adore his justice, and tremble for ourselves!

The prince who was heir to the kingdom, was rejected, as we have seen, by his own citizens, who were under peculiar obligations to receive and welcome him. But when he had assumed his full power, he proceeded to punish their insolence; and, while he vindicated his authority, he destroyed with terrible vengeance those enemies of his government. Thus Jesus predicted, that, though his own nation would openly avow a determined opposition to him, he should come again to assert his supreme dominion, and give them up to the most severe calamities, and to everlasting perdition for their rebellion against him. This has been in part fulfilled already. The Jews, in their national capacity, renounced the Saviour with the utmost malignity, and resisted every effort to establish his kingdom amongst them. But they have felt the weight of his arm. To avenge the insults put upon him, their holy city was ransacked, their temple demolished, their land desolated, their ecclesiastical and civil polity entirely subverted, and a tremendous slaughter, unparalleled in history, nearly completed the ruin of the people.

This alone is enough to strike us with horror; but it is not all. Another, and a far more terrible display of his justice in the punishment of his enemies remains for

for his future advent. And in that, not the unbelieving Jews alone, but all in every age and nation, who reject the Saviour, will be deeply concerned. Whoever shall be found opposers of his grace, unwilling to bow to his sceptre, shall be brought forth for public execution, a spectacle to the whole universe, and shall feel the fierceness of his anger, in torment inexpressible for ever and ever. Let every soul, then, yield an immediate and unreserved subjection to this "King of Zion." Constrained by his mercies, as well as awed by his terrors, let us surrender up ourselves to him, that he may reign over us, and prepare us to reign with him in his glory. Amen.

SECT. 31.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave—was anointed with costly perfume—rode in triumph to Jerusalem—wept over it—purged the temple.

A MORE particular account is given us of the circumstances attending, and immediately preceding, the death of Jesus, than of any part of his life. We are approaching to that important period; and, as we accompany him through the awful scene, we shall observe by what steps the surprising event was accomplished. The subject is calculated, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but to impress our minds with seriousness and solemnity.

We have already contemplated our Lord setting out on his last journey to Jerusalem; previous to which, however, an interesting occurrence had called him into the neighbourhood of that city, though he was soon driven back again by the malicious rage of his enemies, and obliged to seek a distant retreat till his appointed hour arrived. That occurrence we shall introduce in this place, as it is so closely connected with the sequel *.

* John xi. 1, &c.

At

At Bethany, as we have ſeen, about two miles from Jeruſalem, dwelt a pious and beloved family, who were frequently favoured with his company. Lazarus, the head of the family, was ſeized with a violent diſorder, of which his two affectionate ſiſters, Mary and Martha, ſent information to Jeſus, while he remained beyond Jordan. Upon receiving this account, Jeſus obſerved, that the ſickneſs would not terminate in Lazarus's final departure from life, but was intended to diſplay the character, and exalt the glory, of the Son of God. He meant, therefore, to grant relief; and yet he judged it expedient to try the faith and patience of thoſe, for whom he had the ſtrongeſt regard, by deferring his aid, and ſuffering their diſtreſs to increaſe. After two days, and not ſooner, he propoſed to return into Judea; but the diſciples, aware of the malicious deſigns of his enemies, objected to the plan. He declared, however, that, as the day is the proper time for travellers to proſecute their journey, ſo he ſhould ſpend the ſhort reſidue of his life in a diligent attention to the great buſineſs, for which he came into the world.

He then intimated to them the ſituation of Lazarus, and his own intentions reſpecting him. But his words were not underſtood, till he affirmed more explicitly, that Lazarus was dead, and that he conſidered it as a happy circumſtance, that he himſelf was not with him to prevent the change, becauſe their faith would receive an additional confirmation from the miracle, of which they were going to be witneſſes. Still they thought it extremely dangerous to venture ſo near to Jeruſalem; but Thomas adviſed, that they ſhould cheerfully ac-

company

company their dear Maſter, though the conſequence might be fatal to them all.

The affecting narrative will teach even you, whom Jeſus loves, not to be ſurpriſed, if ſickneſs or ſore diſtreſs come upon you. In your deepeſt afflictions, you ought not to conclude, that he has acted unkindly, or that he will not deliver you. Perhaps, you are unwilling to wait for his interpoſition; and for that very reaſon it may be delayed, till your caſe may ſeem deſperate. But in the end you ſhall perceive ſtronger proofs of his power and grace, and find his mercy the more precious. You ſhould learn, alſo, from your Saviour, to improve the hours of the day, and "to walk," while you "ſee the light of this world;" remembering that all your opportunities of uſefulneſs will be cloſed, when the night of death arrives. You ſhould be rouſed to diligence and vigour; nor ſhould the proſpect of dangers intimidate you. Deſert not your ſtandard; but determine, like Thomas, to adhere ſtedfaſtly to Jeſus, and to "follow the Lamb, whitherſoever he goeth," even to the ſevereſt tortures, or to martyrdom itſelf.

When they came to Bethany, Lazarus had been four days in his grave; and many friends from Jeruſalem were aſſembled at the houſe, endeavouring to comfort the mourning ſiſters for the loſs of their brother. Upon an intimation of the approach of Jeſus, Martha, with all that eagerneſs which marked her natural temper, ran to meet him; and, though ſhe ſeemed to upbraid him for not preventing their diſtreſs, ſhe expreſſed a hope, that at his prayer ſome deliverance might yet be obtained. Her language evinced her faith;

faith; but at the ſame time it betrayed much weakneſs. Jeſus in reply, without reproving her for what was wrong or defective in her principles, declared, that Lazarus ſhould riſe again: but a reſurrection from the dead, merely at the final conſummation, was not the relief ſhe wiſhed. He then directed her attention to himſelf, "as the reſurrection and the life," that ſhe might have clearer conceptions of his exalted character, and be ſo ſtrengthened in her dependence upon him, as to expect the miraculous operation, which he meant to perform. His words were moſt ſublime, and replete with inſtruction of peculiar importance. He aſſured her, that as the author, reſtorer, and preſerver of life, he has all power in himſelf to quicken whom he will, and that every believer, by virtue of an union with him, is brought into a ſtate of glorious exiſtence, which death cannot deſtroy or impair. Upon his enquiring, whether ſhe yielded a cordial aſſent to this intereſting truth, ſhe perfectly acquieſced, profeſſing her firm perſuaſion, that he was indeed the promiſed Saviour, the Son of God.

Have we, likewiſe, ſo regarded Jeſus, as he is here repreſented? Behold, what honour is due to his name! Is he not to be revered and worſhipped as "the mighty God," ſince he vindicates to himſelf the prerogative of reviving thoſe, over whom death has prevailed, and of imparting and ſupporting a principle of endleſs life, according to his own ſovereign pleaſure? Shall we not, then, ſtand in awe, and confeſs and adore the Divinity in this exalted Perſonage? What anſwer ſhall we return to the queſtion, "Believeſt thou this?" It is indiſpenſably neceſſary for every one to credit his declaration,

and

and rely upon him for the bleſſing, which he propoſes to beſtow. The promiſe of ſalvation, including both ſpiritual and eternal life, is annexed to faith. If we poſſeſs an unreſerved dependence upon him, how great is our felicity! We ſhall feel the quickening energy of his Spirit, giving vigour to our ſouls, and maintaining that vigour againſt all oppoſition. Nor ſhall any thing be able to deſtroy our union with him. Our preſent mode of exiſtence may ceaſe, and our bodies be conſigned to the grave; but we ſhall even then enjoy a ſtate of happineſs and glory with him; and at the laſt day, " He will ſwallow up death in victory," " ranſom us from the power of the grave," and give us our perfect conſummation and bliſs, both in body and ſoul, in his own everlaſting kingdom. What an unfailing ſource of conſolation is here! " Sorrow not," then, believers, " as others which have no hope."

Mary, who ſeems to have been almoſt overwhelmed with grief, remained in the houſe for ſome time; but at length, being called by her ſiſter, ſhe alſo ran with eager haſte to meet Jeſus. The interview then became extremely affecting. The diſtreſs of theſe affectionate relations and their weeping aſſociates excited the tendereſt emotions in the Saviour: and thus, while he ſympathized with the afflicted, he proved himſelf a partaker of human nature. Many conſiderations, probably, upon this mournful occaſion, oppreſſed his mind, and conſtrained him, as he indulged his compaſſionate feelings, to burſt into tears. He accompanied them to the ſepulchre, and directed the ſtone to be removed. Martha objected, that the body was become offenſive, evidently

 implying,

implying, that deliverance could not then be effected: but Jesus immediately reproved her for her unbelief. Standing by the tomb, with uplifted eyes to heaven, he gave thanks to his Father for granting his requests, and for the present opportunity of displaying his glory; and with a divine majesty, as the supreme Almighty Lord, "to whom belong the issues from death," he commanded the grave to release its prisoner. At this powerful word, Lazarus came forth with life, and health, and vigour.

O what surprise, and joy, and gratitude must have overwhelmed the dear friends, upon the miraculous restoration of him, whom they so tenderly loved, and had considered as irrecoverably removed from their society! Doubtless, they looked up with admiration, love, and praise to the great Deliverer. But how much more illustrious the triumph, when ALL the saints of God shall be raised incorruptible, each of them clothed with a splendour, resembling the sun in the firmament! Then also the eyes of the whole redeemed company shall be fixed on the Saviour, with unutterable ecstasy, and the glory shall be ascribed to him, who is "the resurrection and the life."

Will not this be allowed as an unquestionable evidence of our Lord's divine character? Who can withstand the testimony of one, that arose from the dead? Will not all be constrained to yield unfeigned reverence and submission to the Son of God? Many of those, who were present, felt a forcible conviction from the view of the miracle, and immediately believed on him. But oh! the blindness and obduracy of the human

man heart! External proofs are not ſufficient to produce the efficacious principle of faith: the mighty power of God is requiſite to implant the proper diſpoſition of mind. Some, who were witneſſes of the wondrous fact, carried information of it to his avowed adverſaries, and, as it ſhould ſeem, with the malevolent intention of exciting oppoſition againſt him. At their report, the grand council of the Sanhedrim was aſſembled, to conſult upon the ſteps neceſſary to be taken, for obviating his increaſing popularity. The reſult of their deliberation was, to endeavour by ſome method or other to deſtroy him; and in this they were directed by the advice of Caiaphas, the high-prieſt, who ſpake by a divine impulſe what he did not underſtand, that it was expedient that one man ſhould die for the people. But vain were all their deſigns of violence, till his hour came. He retired to Ephraim, a diſtant city, not far from the river Jordan, where he lay concealed till within a few days of his laſt paſſover, when he ſurrendered himſelf to their malice.

Let us meditate on the unbelief and obſtinacy of the Jews, not that we may frame any bitter invectives againſt them, but that we may fear for ourſelves. Their caſe furniſhes the moſt ſolemn admonition. Let us beware of reſiſting the evidences, which are ſet before us, leſt we be given up to a ſimilar obduracy. Let us pray, that God would put forth his power, in ſubduing our natural depravity: for it requires the ſame Almighty energy, which raiſed Lazarus from the grave, to bring us into a ſtate of unfeigned ſubjection to the Saviour. Thus may we be conſtrained to truſt, and

love, and ſerve him, and to glory in him as "the Author of eternal ſalvation!"

Jeſus, who withdrew from perſecution, has taught us to be prudent in conſulting our ſafety, when no expreſs duty makes it proper to hazard it. But his example likewiſe inſtructs us to face the moſt formidable dangers with firmneſs and intrepidity, in obedience to the will of God. At the appointed ſeaſon, he kept not back from the murderous city, where his enemies thirſted for his blood: though he had all his ſufferings full in his view, he advanced to meet them with cheerfulneſs and courage.

Six days before the paſſover he returned to Bethany, whence he had been driven by the violence of the Jews *. In that town an entertainment was provided for him in the houſe of Simon, who, from his ſurname, had probably once been a leper. Lazarus, alſo, whom he had raiſed from the grave, was one of the gueſts upon that occaſion; and Martha diſcovered her attachment, by waiting upon him. Mary, the other ſiſter of Lazarus, that ſhe might teſtify her affectionate regard and high veneration, procured a box of expenſive ointment compoſed of rich perfumes: part ſhe poured upon his head, and with the remainder anointed his feet, wiping them at the ſame time with her flowing hair. The action was extraordinary, and ſo were the circumſtances. We muſt aſcribe it, doubtleſs, to the moſt excellent principles, which rendered it acceptable to Jeſus. Such was her fervent love, that ſhe ſpared no coſt, to give a ſtriking proof of it; ſuch her deep

* Matt. xxvi. 6—13. Mark xiv. 3—9. John xii. 1—11.

humility,

humility, that ſhe wiſhed to perform the meaneſt as well as the kindeſt office for him.

But her conduct diſguſted ſome, even of the diſciples, who probably condemned it as wild and extravagant. Judas, in particular, objected to her from the baſeſt motives: while he pretended, what he never felt, a tender concern for the poor, and argued, that the price of the ointment had better have been devoted to charitable uſes, he meant to appropriate it to his own uſe. Jeſus, however, who knew the purity of her intentions, and the ſtrength of her regard for him, undertook her defence. He juſtified and commended the action, as being well ſuited to his dying ſituation, and as it were an embalming of his body, preparatory to his burial. He obſerved, that opportunities of relieving indigence continually occur, which ſhould draw forth the benevolence of his people; but that, as he was ſoon to leave them, and few more occaſions of miniſtering to him would be afforded, ſome extraordinary marks of reſpect might properly be paid him at that time. He declared alſo, to ſhew his gracious acceptance of her love, that, wherever the Goſpel ſhould be publiſhed, her affection for him ſhould be celebrated.

This little narrative will furniſh an inſtructive leſſon. Let us not precipitately or warmly cenſure thoſe zealous exertions in the ſervice of Chriſt, which may appear to us needleſs or extravagant. While we condemn, Jeſus may highly approve. The ardour of ſome perſons, in certain uncommon caſes, may carry them ſuch lengths, as would be extremely improper in the ordinary courſe of things. We may not clearly under-

ſtand the circumſtances or the motives of their conduct; and therefore let us leave them to him, who knows their hearts, and who will not only make all favourable allowances for the ſincere, but applaud and reward whatever they have done from a pure, diſintereſted regard to him.

Perhaps you, who are forward to reproach others for their intemperate heat, may be much more diſpleaſing to Chriſt by your coldneſs, and heſitation, and fear of going too far in his cauſe. How rare is ſuch love, as that of Mary to her Lord and Saviour! Many will profeſs a ſtrong attachment to him, who refuſe to be at any expenſe in his ſervice. We aſk, then, if you can part with your money for his ſake. You cannot, indeed, yield an exact imitation of this pious woman, ſince the bodily preſence of Jeſus is removed from the earth. But his poor remain among us, and they are appointed his receivers: "whenſoever ye will, ye may do them good." O let us beware of a covetous, parſimonious ſpirit, which would repreſent a liberal diſpoſition as improper or waſteful. There are thoſe, who will plead for charity, as Judas, till they are brought to the trial; and then it appears, that they are more anxious to increaſe their own ſtore, than to relieve the indigent. Let us judge ourſelves: why are we content with doing ſo little, or why do we rate that little ſo highly?

When it was known at Jeruſalem, that Jeſus was in the neighbourhood, a large concourſe of people reſorted from that city to Bethany, not merely for his ſake, but that they might have a ſight of Lazarus, who was

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ſo wonderful a monument of his power and grace. The miracle, which had been wrought, had already attached the hearts of many to the Saviour, and excited the curioſity of more; but the chief prieſts, who were enraged on this very account, ſeriouſly meditated, not only his deſtruction, but that alſo of him who had been recalled from the grave. How fooliſh as well as wicked the deſign! He who had been once raiſed from the dead, might, with the ſame eaſe, have been inſtantly reſtored again. But thoſe, who reſiſt the Lord's Anointed are chargeable with the groſſeſt abſurdity. Their wiſeſt contrivances are "a vain thing:" and "the Lord ſhall have them in deriſion *."

We do not wonder, that they, whoſe caſes have illuſtriouſly diſplayed the mercy of the Redeemer, are perſecuted like Lazarus, with peculiar malignity. The enemies of Jeſus, who really aim at Him, direct their envenomed ſhafts againſt them, who are witneſſes for his name. Believers, however, may poſſeſs peace and confidence in the midſt of oppoſition, ſince their Defender is invincible. He, who keepeth them, has numbered the very hairs of their head, and declares, that "none ſhall pluck them out of his hand †."

We have accompanied Jeſus to the neighbourhood of Jeruſalem, and now we contemplate his remarkable entrance into the city. Hitherto we have ſeen that he ſought not any worldly honours, having ſtudiouſly declined even the ſemblance of pomp and oſtentation. But toward the cloſe of his life we perceive a different ſcene. We behold the humble Nazarene attended by

* Pſal. ii. 1—4. † John x. 28.

a ſingular proceſſion, in which, while he permitted the people to do him homage, he deſigned to exhibit a repreſentation of his regal character.

Anno Dom. 31. Sunday before the Paſſover.

On the day after his entertainment at Bethany, he proceeded on his journey. When he came to the mount of Olives, he ſent two of his diſciples to an adjacent village, that they might bring thence an aſs and her unbroken foal *. He directed them to the very place, and ſo minutely deſcribed the circumſtances, in which they ſhould find the animals, as to ſhew his exact knowledge of things diſtant and ſeemingly accidental. The narrative alſo proves, that he could influence the minds of men, as he pleaſed; for the owners of the aſs relinquiſhed her without heſitation, upon being told, that "the Lord had need of her." The young colt he condeſcended to make the bearer of his perſon, and rode in a ſort of triumph to the city, with much meekneſs and yet with an appearance of majeſty †.

Many

* Matt. xxi. 1—16. Mark xi. 1—11. Luke xix. 29, &c. John xii. 12—19.

† There was nothing ridiculous or mean in Chriſt's riding on an aſs; for, not to mention that this animal in eaſtern countries is of a larger ſize and more graceful appearance than among us, ſome of the moſt eminent perſons, patriarchs, judges, and kings, made uſe of aſſes: and, probably, with a reference to that primitive ſimplicity, he choſe this method of going in ſolemn and triumphant proceſſion to Jeruſalem. Gen. xxii. 3. Exod. iv. 20. Judg. v. 10. x. 4. 2 Sam. xvi. 2. xix. 26. He meant to aſſert his regal character, according to the ancient ſtyle and cuſtom of their princes, and to declare his regard to the law, by diſcountenancing that uſe of

Many persons conducted him from Bethany, and many more, having heard of his raising Lazarus from the grave, came from Jerusalem to meet him. The whole multitude, as if by a miraculous impulse, appeared to vie with each other in ascribing all possible honours to him. They spread their garments in the way, and, cutting down branches of trees, part of them they strewed upon the road, and with part they marched before him; these being usual expressions of joy, upon the arrival of a potent Monarch or victorious General. Under a full conviction, that Jesus was the Messiah, and the expectation of his assuming the government, they began to praise God with a loud voice, and to shout with exultation, though they understood not the import of their own words, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is the King, that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!"

Do we ask the reason of all this? Among other causes to be assigned, it was the purpose of God to fulfil an ancient prophecy. Zechariah had expresly foretold *, that the Saviour, the King of Zion, would make such a public appearance, as is here described. The most minute circumstances in this view, as completions of former and authentic predictions, are important: they furnish incontestable evidence for the truth of the Gospel. How manifold is the wisdom of God, who raised

of horses, which had been introduced through a fondness for splendour, and which God had expresly forbidden. Deut. xvii. 16. See Bp. Chandler's defence of Christianity, and Bp. Sherlock's Dissertation on Christ's entrance into Jerusalem.

* Zech. ix. 9.

up holy men, and instructed them to declare, some hundred years before, many of the things which the Redeemer should both do and say! No event can take place, which he did not foresee, and which, in this sense, did not form a part of his original plan.

Do we join in these acclamations, and welcome the King of Israel with our Hosannas? Do we, with ardent and devout affections, exult in the blessings of his government, which brings peace to man and glory to God? And do we most earnestly pray for an extensive enlargement of his dominion, even to the ends of the earth? Such zeal as this may be termed madness and enthusiasm; and accordingly, there are few, who dare to express any real fervour in the cause of Christ, lest they should expose themselves to scorn and derision. But the day of his complete triumph is coming, of which his procession to Jerusalem was a faint emblem. He shall soon be revealed in all the splendour of his divine majesty; and the honours of his kingdom shall be universally acknowledged. Saints and Angels shall join, with inexpressible love and transport, in everlasting acclamations to the Son of David. Would you bear a part in the joyful exultations of that day, and celebrate the high praises of your Redeemer? You must begin your song on earth, confess his glory, and pray that the purposes of his spiritual government may be fully effected within yourselves.

This profound veneration, paid to Jesus, these rapturous shouts of applause, were offensive to the Pharisees. They cried out in a rage, "We prevail nothing; Behold, the world is gone after him." They called

called upon him to reprehend his diſciples for their officious and intemperate zeal. But, he defended their conduct, maintaining that the honour due to his exalted character muſt be proclaimed, even though a miracle ſhould be requiſite to accompliſh that end, and that, if they were to be ſilenced, the very ſtones would riſe up as witneſſes for him. And does not the temper of the ancient Phariſees prevail in modern times? Are there not many, who would damp the fervour, and reſiſt the vigorous efforts, of thoſe lively Chriſtians, who labour to advance the kingdom of Chriſt? He, however, will ſecure his own glory; for, though we and thouſands more refuſe to praiſe him, he will raiſe up others to do it, even ſuch, perhaps, as may be vile and contemptible in our eyes. Let the followers of Jeſus, then, indulge a holy tranſport, while they raiſe their acclamations to Him. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

But the triumph was ſoon interrupted, and the Redeemer himſelf bathed in tears. How affecting the ſight! When he approached the city, ſo as to take in a full view of its extent and magnificence, he felt the tendereſt compaſſion for its unbelieving and obdurate inhabitants. Foreſeeing the complicated miſeries and entire deſolation, which awaited them, ſo far from exulting in their confuſion and deſtruction, he mourned, he lamented for them. He cried out, in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, "Oh, that thou hadſt known, even thou, at leaſt in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." He then added a clear and circumſtantial prediction of the

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ſiege and total overthrow of that infatuated place, aſſigning, as the reaſon of all its calamities, the indifference and neglect with which his gracious offers had been treated.

The caſe of Jeruſalem ſpeaks aloud to us, and calls us to examine, whether we know, or ſeriouſly attend to, "the things which belong unto our peace." It warns us, not to reject or make light of the Goſpel, which is calculated to ſecure to us both preſent and everlaſting happineſs. Soon may "the glad tidings" be withdrawn; and He, who now addreſſes us in terms of mercy, may appear againſt us as our adverſary, in the thunders of his wrath. This, then, is "the time of our viſitation;" for the Saviour himſelf waits upon us in the miniſtry of his word. Are we aware of the important conſequences of the preſent moment? If ſalvation be deſpiſed, it will be the ground of our heavieſt condemnation: and we ourſelves may periſh with a more terrible deſtruction, than even the ſinners of Jeruſalem.

The entrance of Jeſus with ſo ſingular a proceſſion, threw the whole city into commotion, and excited a general enquiry about this extraordinary Perſonage. Very ſoon he diſplayed the glory of his character by different proofs. He went immediately to the temple, and began, as with divine anthority, to correct the abuſes, and puniſh the profanations which prevailed there. Now again, as he had done before, he drove out the traders with indignation, and vindicated the honour of that holy place, which God had choſen to himſelf for "the houſe of prayer." By freſh miracles, alſo, in healing the blind and the lame, he gave the ſtrongeſt evidence,

evidence, that he had a full right to that power which he exercifed.

Were not all, then, at length convinced, and perfuaded to receive him? The very children took up the fong, while they cried, as if by a fupernatural impulfe, "Hofanna to the Son of David:" and thus their infant tongues, in celebrating the praifes of the Redeemer, were witneffes againft the rulers of the people. The chief priefts, who ought to have been his moft zealous advocates, expreffed violent difpleafure at thefe proceedings. But Jefus vindicated the acclamations of the children, and fhewed from the fcriptures, that it was God's determination to get himfelf glory, as he did in that inftance, "out of the mouth of babes and fucklings *." How fhould this encourage thofe of youngeft years, to offer their adorations to Jefus! It cannot be too foon for them to learn hofannas to his name. He will liften to them with peculiar delight, and confider himfelf honoured by their weak attempts. Perhaps, too, he may make ufe of them, to confound the wifeft and ftrongeft of his enemies.

The common people, likewife, were much affected by the doctrines of Jefus. While he taught them daily in the temple, they crowded to hear him, and appeared to hang upon his words. In general, the lower orders have been found to yield a ferious and eager attention to the Gofpel; while the rich too frequently, poffeffing more pride and prejudice, turn away their ears in difdain. The Jewifh rulers continued to feek the deftruction of Jefus; but their malice was reftrained

* Pfal. viii. 2.

a few

a few days longer. As he had so many adherents among the poor, they were afraid of proceeding to any act of violence against him: nor could their efforts have at last succeeded, except he had surrendered himself into their hands. The mournful history exhibits the strongest proofs of the wickedness of man: but it affords us, also, a pleasing representation of the grace of the Saviour, waiting to shew mercy to his most virulent opposers. May we be constrained, by a sense of his great love, to drop all our perverse objections to him, and yield ourselves unfeignedly to his disposal! Thus may we be redeemed to God, and established "unblamable in holiness" through Jesus Christ! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 32.

Jesus instructed certain enquiring Greeks—warned the unbelieving Jews—cursed a barren fig-tree—confounded those, who questioned his authority—admonished them by the parable of the two sons, and by that of the vineyard, let out to unfaithful husbandmen.

A GENERAL commotion was excited in Jerusalem by our Lord's singular entrance into it, by the loud hosannas sung before him, and by the miracles, which he there publicly performed. Many persons of different dispositions came about him: some sincere enquirers sought his instructions; but a more numerous company opposed him with extreme malignity. He varied the manner of his address, according to the cases and characters of the people; and yet in every instance he preserved the same "meekness of wisdom." May his followers, and especially his ministers, learn from him to be "gentle unto all men," as well as to be ready always to declare "the hope that is in them!"

As the celebration of the passover approached, a large concourse of those, who professed to worship the God of Israel, was then assembled at Jerusalem from all

all parts of Judea. Among the rest were certain pious Greeks, probably of Gentile extraction, who desired to be introduced to Jesus *. They applied to Philip for this purpose, and he, together with Andrew, whom he consulted on the occasion, informed Jesus of their wishes. They were immediately conducted into his presence, and the Saviour addressed them, with great solemnity, to the following effect:

"The Son of man, whom you now behold in circumstances of meanness, is about to enter on a state of the highest exaltation. But be not staggered, while you observe, that my glory is preceded by extreme sufferings; for these are necessary to accomplish the object which I have in view, the salvation of precious souls. As the wheat springs up from the grain, which at first seems to perish in the earth, and which, except it putrefy, will produce no increase; so a numerous company shall be redeemed to God, in consequence of my death, and not one of the human race can be saved without it. He also, that professes an attachment to my cause, must be willing to make the most painful sacrifices. A solicitous regard to your temporal interests, will endanger your eternal welfare; but, while you can cheerfully give up life itself for my sake, you adopt the most effectual method to secure your own happiness for ever. If, therefore, you would acknowledge me, as your Lord and Master, you must be obedient to my command, and follow without hesitation, wherever I shall lead, even to the severest calamities; and then you shall be with me, to behold my glory, and sit down with me in

* John xii. 20, &c.

my

my kingdom. My Father himſelf will declare his approbation of your conduct, and confer diſtinguiſhed honour upon you."

It is pleaſing to obſerve, that there are any humble enquirers after Jeſus. His faithful miniſters will rejoice to direct you, and encourage your application to him. They will, as it were, take you by the hand, and conduct you to the knowledge of him, whoſe acquaintance you ſeek: nay he himſelf waits to receive you. But, while you come to him, attend to his ſolemn declarations. As he "hath ſuffered for us in the fleſh," you muſt "arm yourſelves with the ſame mind *," and endure the croſs. Let it ſuffice you, that, "if you ſuffer, you ſhall alſo reign with him †." Is this, what you object to? Do you determine to renounce the ſervice of Chriſt, becauſe it will ſubject you to difficulties, and reſolve to gratify your own corrupt nature, becauſe it promiſes you much preſent enjoyment? Ah! how unwiſe a choice, how unfair an eſtimate, do you make! For Jeſus holds out a crown of glory to his deſpiſed and oppreſſed followers; but your carnal pleaſures are momentary, and, if continued in, will be ſucceeded by endleſs torment and deſpair.

Our Lord, having adverted to his approaching ſufferings, was deeply affected with the proſpect; and, as if the terrors of death had fallen upon him, he cried out, "Now is my ſoul troubled." He ſeemed, for a moment, confounded in the view, and ready to petition, that he might be reſcued from the croſs. But, whatever the weakneſs of human nature might ſuggeſt, he

* 1 Pet. iv. 1. † 2 Tim. ii. 12.

 reſolved

resolved not to shrink from that, which was the grand object of his incarnation; and therefore he prayed only, "Father, glorify thy name." Immediately a voice from heaven declared, that the divine glory had already been secured, and would yet be more signally displayed, by his ministry. While the astonished multitude wondered at the sound, many of them not hearing the words distinctly, Jesus remarked, that this testimony was given not for his sake, as he could want no further assurances of his Father's love, but for the confirmation of their faith.

He then exulted in the confident expectation of the blessed consequences, which would result from his death. He affirmed the moment to be at hand, when by his interposition the world should be delivered from the usurped dominion of the Devil, and sinners every where, of all ranks and characters, should be attracted by the view of his cross, to make application to him, and enlist themselves as faithful soldiers under his banner.

This affords us an endearing representation of the Saviour. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth," in peevish complaints to God, or bitter invectives against man. Though he felt unutterable anguish, he expressed not the least impatience: his only prayer was, that the honour of the divine name might be exalted, whatever he might endure. Here, then, is our pattern: we should resign ourselves to the disposal of God with like meekness and unreserved submission, and be more solicitous for his glory, than our own personal ease and security. Alas! how little have we "learned Christ!" This is fully evinced

evinced by our fretfulneſs, diſcontent, and ſelfiſhneſs, by our eager deſire that our trials may be removed, rather than the intereſt of religion promoted. Have we conſidered, that it is one grand deſign of the death of Chriſt, to deliver us from all carnal affections, and from the power of darkneſs? Is Satan indeed caſt out from the poſſeſſion of our hearts? Have we by faith beheld the Son of man "lifted up from the earth," and felt the conſtraining influence of his croſs? Are we, then, "drawn unto him," ſo as to acknowledge our ſubjection, and vow unfeigned allegiance?

Our Lord's intimation of his approaching diſſolution was cavilled at by ſome of the people, as inconſiſtent with the ſcriptural declarations of the perpetuity of Meſſiah's office. But he knowing their captious diſpoſition, exhorted them not to trifle away their preſent opportunities of inſtruction. He warned them, that the light, which then ſhone upon them, and which was ſufficient to conduct them to eternal life, would ſoon be removed if they refuſed to follow its guidance, and they would be left in a ſtate of deplorable ignorance and ſin. How ſolemn the admonition, and how applicable to many in modern times! Are there not thoſe, to whom the word of ſalvation is ſent, who ſhew a fondneſs for perverſe diſputation, rather than an humble deſire of receiving ſpiritual advantage? We entreat them, therefore, to conſider the day of their viſitation. Much of it is already gone: and has the great buſineſs of life ever yet been ſeriouſly attempted? Why need we anſwer this or the other queſtion, which you propoſe, if you are not earneſtly ſolicitous to ſave your im-

mortal ſouls? O take heed, leſt, while you trifle, "darkneſs come upon you!"

We are not informed, with what effect Jeſus delivered his inſtructions to the enquiring Greeks; but a tremendous account is given us of many of the Jews, who were preſent on this occaſion. When they began to cavil, he departed, and withdrew from them the light which they deſpiſed. They believed not on him, but obſtinately reſiſted all that ſtrength of evidence, which he had ſet before them in a long train of unqueſtionable miracles. The Evangeliſt obſerves, that the lamentation of Iſaiah, complaining of the general rejection of the Saviour *, might properly be uſed with peculiar reference to them; and that his prophecy of the fatal, judicial blindneſs and obduracy of the Jewiſh nation was accompliſhed at that very time †. He concluded, therefore, that their caſe was deſperate, and that all means employed for their converſion would be ineffectual.

O let us fear, leſt we alſo come under the ſame condemnation, by an abuſe of our preſent privileges! When ſinners obſtinately perſiſt in ſtopping their ears againſt the calls of God, he determines that they ſhall not hear. And is not this a righteous diſpenſation, though the conſequences be moſt tremendous? Who ſhall object? We are aware, that this matter is perverſely miſrepreſented, as if men were conſtrained to ſin by a poſitive evil influence from God himſelf; or as if "they could not believe," though they moſt eagerly deſired and endeavoured to do it. This is far

* Iſa. liii. 1. † vi. 9, 10.

from

from the case. They are left to their own choice; and God's final desertion of them is only the just punishment of their obstinate opposition. But when he withdraws, we know that the most confirmed unbelief will ensue. We pray, therefore, "O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us *!"

Many of the Jewish rulers felt a strong conviction in their minds, that Jesus was the Messiah; but they dared not avow that conviction, because a public confession of him would have brought upon them severe reproach and persecution, and they were more solicitous to preserve their reputation with men, than obtain the favour of God. How wretched the case! And yet many may read in them, what they themselves are. Such are those, who have not courage to meet the scorn and displeasure of the world, in defence of that system of doctrine and practice, which they are persuaded is most agreeable to the sacred scriptures. The approbation of God is made light of, and his anger provoked by such a conduct. Surely, we give too much consequence to our fellow-creatures, in courting their notice and dreading their anger, with the sacrifice of conscience. What will they be able to do for us in the hour of death, or in the day of judgment?

Jesus departed from them, but he took another opportunity of delivering a solemn admonition. He asserted his divine mission, and his union with the Father. He delared himself the grand Luminary of mankind, who will communicate light to all sincere enquirers, and guide their feet into the way of peace. Yet,

* Liturgy.

though the intent of his appearance on the earth was to confer ſalvation, rather than pronounce judgment, he obſerved that unbelievers ſhall not eſcape, but ſhall be condemned in the laſt day by that word, which they now contemptuouſly reject. How righteous the ſentence, ſince they deſpiſe and oppoſe the will of God, ſo clearly manifeſted to them by his Son!

And as Jeſus acted, ſo muſt his miniſters. They too muſt warn ſinners of their danger. Will you, then, receive the record, which he hath given? He demands your attention, not only as the meſſenger, but as the repreſentative, and the very image of the inviſible God. Can you diſprove the credentials, which he has exhibited? Or why ſhould you reſiſt him, who comes to reſcue our fallen race from periſhing, and who brings light, life, and peace to all that believe? Do you not fear the awful doom, which awaits his enemies? The Lord God will vindicate the honour of his Goſpel; and, at the final conſummation, you muſt account to him for your preſent neglect and contempt of it. Ah! how many will wiſh, that they had lived and died in Pagan darkneſs, ſince the word of ſalvation, which is ſent unto them, will witneſs againſt them, and, as it aggravates their guilt, increaſe their miſery for ever!

Monday in Paſſion week. It ſhould ſeem, that Jeſus was obliged to hide himſelf from the malicious attempts of his opponents, and that each evening he retired from Jeruſalem to Bethany for his own comfort as well as ſafety *. Very early in the morning, probably on the

* Mat. xxi. 17—19. Mark xi. 11—19.

ſecond day of the week, he returned with ardent zeal to the city, from which he had fled the night before. Having ſet out without taking any food, he felt the call of hunger by the way, and thus proved that he really partook of our infirmities. A fig-tree being ſeen at a diſtance, he went to it, that he might refreſh himſelf with the fruit, which might then be expected to be on the tree, as the time of gathering the figs was not arrived. But upon his approach, finding it barren, though its leaves afforded a fair appearance, he pronounced a curſe upon it, that it never ſhould be able to produce any increaſe in ſucceeding ſeaſons. The effect of the imprecation was immediate: "the fig-tree withered away." We are not to aſcribe our Lord's conduct upon this occaſion to weakneſs or peeviſhneſs of ſpirit, ſuch as we may betray under a painful diſappointment: it was, evidently, a ſignificant action, deſigned to convey ſome important inſtruction.

He exhibited therein an awful emblem of the Jewiſh nation, who, with all their profeſſion and ſhew of piety, were deſtitute of real goodneſs, and were therefore ſoon to be devoted to deſtruction. That guilty people were doomed by his curſe, like the fig-tree, to be reduced from a flouriſhing to a deſolate condition. The caſe of all vain pretenders to religion is exactly ſimilar. They may appear beautiful to the eye, and raiſe an expectation in others of much fruit: but, though they ſtand in the Church, they bring no glory to God, and remain unprofitable. He may bear long with them; but his vengeance will fall upon them at the laſt, and ſo entirely conſume them, as to "leave them nei-

ther root nor branch *." Ah! what jealousy should this excite in us, respecting our own state! When the Lord himself comes to search, will any increase of holiness be found upon us?

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem, he visited the temple, and again endeavoured to correct the flagrant violations of that sacred place, asserting its proper use, as a house devoted to the service of God. His faithful admonitions, as before, enraged the scribes and chief priests against him, so that they wished to destroy him instantly; they observed his influence among the people, and dreaded its consequences. In the evening he once more retired from the city; a retreat apparently necessary for his security.

Tuesday in Passion week. In the morning of the day following, as he passed by the same road, his disciples, who accompanied him, expressed their astonishment, when they saw the fig-tree withered away †. They perceived in this instance an additional proof of the power of their divine Master, and he taught them from it to depend more firmly upon him. He encouraged them to believe, that his Almighty hand would be exerted in their behalf, and that, while they relied implicitly on the promise of God, they should be enabled to confirm their doctrine by miracles far superior to this. But, that they might perform such extraordinary operations, he exhorted them to offer up importunate prayer to God, with strong faith, assuring them that their most confident expectations of the divine blessing

* Mal. iv. 1.

† Mat. xxi. 20, &c. Mark xi. 20, &c. xii. 1—12. Luke xx. 1—19.

would

would not be disappointed. He insisted, also, on a charitable, forgiving disposition, as so absolutely requisite, that without it all their addresses to God would be ineffectual.

The supernatural powers, with which they were invested, are not now wanted; and it would be presumption in us to ask for them. But there are advantages and privileges more excellent and valuable, which we may look for, and which we should "ask in faith, nothing wavering *." We need not wonder, that our petitions for the influences of the Spirit have failed of success, if we cannot credit God for the performance of his promise, or believe that he will hear us. To ensure a favourable acceptance, we should likewise lay aside our evil tempers, when we approach to the God of peace and love. He will not vouchsafe his presence and assistance to those, whose hearts burn with resentment, one against another. We are to "lift up holy hands without wrath," as well as without "doubting †."

After passing by the barren fig-tree, our Lord came again to Jerusalem, and taught publicly in the temple. The chief priests, scribes, and elders (which expressions may denote the members of the Sanhedrim), being much enraged against him, demanded of him, what authority he possessed, which could justify his extraordinary conduct. Had the question been proposed with an humble desire of receiving information, we apprehend that Jesus would have given a different answer; for he never disappointed the serious enquirer. But, knowing

* James i. 6. † 1 Tim. ii. 8.

the pride and obſtinacy of their hearts, he intended, not ſo much to inſtruct, as to ſilence and confound them. He therefore interrogated them on what foundation the miniſtry of John the Baptiſt reſted: for, ſince John had borne the moſt deciſive teſtimony for him, as he himſelf had for John, they both ſtood on the ſame ground. This involved them in a difficulty. They could not allow the prophetical character of John, without allowing that of Jeſus alſo; and they dared not deny it, through fear of the people, who held the name of the Baptiſt in the higheſt veneration. They were, therefore, obliged to confeſs their ignorance, and to relinquiſh their malevolent examination. How admirable was that wiſdom, which could at once perplex the moſt ſubtle adverſaries, and defeat all their purpoſes!

Do not many, alſo, among ourſelves, like thoſe ancient cavillers, demand, by what proofs the authority of Jeſus is aſcertained? We are not afraid of bringing the matter to a fair trial before impartial judges: for the truth cannot ſuffer by a ſerious diſquiſition. But take heed, with what temper and motive you weigh the evidences of the Goſpel. They are ſtrong enough to convince thoſe, who are not biaſſed by pride or prejudice. But, if you enter upon the ſubject with an unhumbled, captious diſpoſition, probably difficulties will occur, which will prevent your attaining any ſatisfaction: and it is a righteous thing with God to permit it. Many, who affect to call themſelves freethinkers, take up the Bible, with no deſire to regulate their faith or practice by it, but with a previous determination to raiſe objections. Can ſuch perſons, who

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are evidently blinded by their passions, be competent to decide upon this subject? Or is it likely, that, while they resolve not to be persuaded, Jesus will vouchsafe to guide them by the light of his Spirit?

But, though our Lord seemed to evade the enquiries of his enemies, he still warned them by a faithful and striking representation of the baseness of their character, and by intimations, which they could not mistake, of the awful destruction, they should soon feel.

1. He described the different conduct of two sons, who were both directed by their Father to work in his vineyard. The first, with great insolence, refused to obey, but afterwards, ashamed of his perverseness, submitted, and fulfilled the injunction. The second, with fair professions of regard, and an express promise of compliance, continued to neglect the command. Jesus then appealed to his auditors upon the case he had proposed; and while they were obliged to confess, that he, who for a time avowed an opposition to his parent's will, had yet performed a more dutiful part than the other, they condemned themselves. For, with high pretences to piety, they were more averse to God's design of saving sinners, than the most open and profligate offenders. Our Lord failed not to make this very pointed application; "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." He referred them for a proof of his assertion, to their rejection of John's ministry, to which persons of abandoned character had submitted.

Let all the professors of religion be excited to examine themselves. You say, "I go, Sir;" but are you

not acting as dissemblers? With declarations of love and obedience upon your tongues, are you not in your lives and tempers most opposite to God? Have you cordially complied with the scheme of salvation in the Gospel? You may pride yourselves upon your morality or devotion, as the Pharisees did: yet, if you "have not submitted yourselves unto the righteousness of God," you possess more odious dispositions, and may be farther from heaven, than those who are notoriously dissolute and profane. This is an offensive position: but here we discover the malignity and danger of self-dependence, which is more likely to prevent us from a sincere reception of the Saviour, than any atrocious crimes; and we perceive, also, the freeness and sufficiency of that grace, which can rescue from destruction the most enormous sinners.

This representation, however, should not be thought favourable to your licentious practices, who have avowedly cast off the fear of God. Your iniquities are detestable before him, and, if not renounced, will "bring upon you swift destruction." But we thank God for the revelation of mercy through his Son; and on this ground we can encourage you to "turn unto him, from whom you have deeply revolted." We are, also, sanguine in the expectation of succeeding with you: for, surely, the Gospel must at once appear suitable to your case, as it is addressed to them, "who are ready to perish," and offers a full and gratuitous pardon to the most guilty.

2. He described the base conduct and certain condemnation of the Jews, in a parabolical representation

of

of wicked husbandmen, who were intrusted with the care of a vineyard. The owner sent his servants to demand the produce; but the messengers were treated by them with extreme violence and cruelty; they were beaten, stoned, and killed. At last, as the grand expedient for recovering them to their duty, his only and beloved Son was dispatched on the same errand; but, though he had a peculiar claim tc be received with veneration, they unanimously determined to put him to death.

Jesus then appealed to his captious hearers; and they allowed that these unfaithful husbandmen should be deprived of that trust, which they had abused, and be destroyed for their iniquity. But, in doing this, being blindly inattentive to their own guilt, they passed sentence on themselves. Jesus also confirmed the sentence, declaring, that the kingdom of God, or the dispensation of his mercy, should be withdrawn from them, and committed to another people. He further observed, that a remarkable prophecy was then fulfilled, since the very stone, which the builders refused, was appointed the head-stone of the corner, as the main support of the whole building *. And he solemnly warned them, that, by taking offence at him or his doctrine, they exposed themselves to the heaviest calamities in this life, and that finally, when his whole vengeance should fall upon them, they would perish with tremendous and irreparable ruin.

The Jewish rulers perceived, that the parable, which he had delivered, was directed against them; and yet the awful admonition did not duly affect them. They

* Psal. cxviii. 22.

hardened

hardened their hearts the more, and again they sought for some means of destroying him, that they might no longer be troubled with his reproofs. At that time, however, they dared not to carry their wishes into effect: the multitude, who still revered him as a prophet, would not suffer them to seize him. We observe, that God can restrain the malicious attempts of his fiercest enemies; nor can they ever prevail, "except it be given them from above." A firm persuasion of this truth will inspire the believer with confidence and joy, though "ten thousands of people set themselves against him round about *."

The judgments, denounced against the Jews, have been fulfilled; and thus God hath "avenged the quarrel of his covenant." Through their unbelief, "the kingdom of God" is come unto us: and, if we would not provoke him to take it from us, as he has done from them, we should beware of rejecting "the chief corner-stone," which God hath laid in Zion, and on which alone, as "the sure foundation," his Church can stand. Let us build our hopes upon him, and we shall never be ashamed †. But inconceivable anguish, torment, and despair shall be the portion of all those, to whom he is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even of them, which stumble at the word, being disobedient ‡." May we so contemplate his character, that he may be more and more exalted in our estimation, till we be admitted to see his face in glory! Amen.

* Psal. iii. 6. † Rom. ix. 33. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 8.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.